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**“A DISAPPEARANCE OF ALTERNATIVES”:
CONTESTING MONOCULTURES IN THE BOLIVIAN LOWLANDS**

Elizabeth Ralston

Senior Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Bachelor of Arts degree in Geography

Advisor, Professor Brian Godfrey

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Abstract

This thesis considers how destruction of biodiversity and destruction of diverse knowledges and cultures are deeply connecting, examining the case study of the Santa Cruz Autonomy Movement in the Bolivian lowlands. In 2005, a wave of anti-neoliberal social movements swept indigenous labor activist Evo Morales, to power. Morales and his party, the MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo or Movement towards Socialism) promised a “process of change” away from the nation’s colonial and neoliberal pasts, involving nationalization of natural resources, land redistribution, and environmental protections based around the indigenous ideology of “Vivir Bien” (living well) of all living things. Elites in Santa Cruz, enriched by agroindustry, organized a powerful movement for regional autonomy lasting from 2004-2008 which sought to evade Morales’ redistributive land reforms and maintain the deeply unequal status quo. Most studies of the Santa Cruz Autonomy movement concern themselves with the ideological, identity, and performance aspects of the movement, however I argue that the autonomy movement is best understood as a *political ecology* movement, highlighting the centrality of land, nature, and agriculture in the movement’s goals. Utilizing Vandana Shiva’s idea of “Monocultures of the Mind” I argue that the autonomy movement can be seen as dual processes of producing homogeneity of both the environment and the society of Santa Cruz. Movement leaders sought to produce and perform a homogenous regional identity, a “monoculture of the mind” in order to legitimize control of territory and expand their physical systems of monoculture. Despite claims from the MAS and scholarship that the autonomy movement was defeated in 2010, studying the movement from a political ecology lens demonstrates the essential successes of the Santa Cruz elites not only to expand their systems of monocultures within the department, but also to embed the logic of monocultures in the MAS’s “process of change.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION:

THE BOLIVIAN RIGHT AND THE DESTRUCTION OF DIVERSITY

In November of 2019 President Evo Morales, about to enter his fourth term, was forced to flee the country when the Organization of American (OAS) alleged electoral fraud and the Bolivian military withdrew support from his presidency. This marked the end of Morales' remarkable 14-year presidency, which won re-election in 2005, 2009, and 2014 at higher margins than any other political party in recent Bolivian history, owing to Morales' continuous support from Bolivia's indigenous majority thanks to his policies which tripled the size of the economy and significantly investments to social welfare which cut poverty rates in half (Farthing 2020, 5). Morales, and many international observers, decried a "coup" of the Bolivian right (Fabricant and Gustafson 2020, 105).). The downfall of Morales brought about national and international concerns of US involvement, due in part to Bolivia's lengthy history of foreign-backed coup d'états however domestic politics played the defining role in Morales' downfall (Farthing 2020, 5), particularly his right-wing opposition in the Lowlands department of Santa Cruz.

Evo Morales and his party, the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement Towards Socialism or the MAS), came to power amid waves of left and indigenous social movements in Latin America which not only sought redistributive reform and racial justice, but "challenged the underlying principles and material structures of capitalist modernity." (Colletta and Raftopolous 2020, 12). Morales, the son of Aymara peasants and the leader of the Coca grower's union, was the first indigenous president of Bolivia, a nation which is one of two majority-indigenous countries in Latin America. His election marked a seismic shift in Bolivia's history, not only due to the symbolic importance of his indigenous identity, but due to his commitment to an ambitious

agenda to “decolonize the state” through the promotion of indigenous frameworks for environmental sustainability and implementation of socialist redistributive policies. In its entirety, Morales asserted his government constituted a *proceso de cambio* (process of change) and a “refounding” of the nation which expelled the legacies of colonialism and neoliberalism and replaced them with a “plurinational” state of indigenous nations (Villarreal 2020, 4). Morales incorporated indigenous ideas complementarity, *vivir bien* (living well) of all beings and an ethic of respect for- and non-commodification of- the environment, as was solidified in the 2010 *Ley de Derechos de Madre Tierra* (Law of the Rights of Mother Earth).

Morales’s platform rested on three main pillars: the ‘nationalization’ of the hydrocarbon industry and the use of hydrocarbon rents for social programs; the rewriting of the constitution to incorporate indigenous and socialist values; and largescale land reform (Ezinna 2008, 218).

While Morales land reforms efforts have perhaps received the least attention from international media and scholarship, these efforts posed perhaps the most direct threat to the reproduction of the capitalist system (Ezinna 2008, 218). While nationalization of natural gas provided crucial social programming and “bonds”, small loans which helped reduce poverty in the country, the prospect of land reform promised a radical break from the primary commodity export-dependent system which Morales inherited. Land reform offered the possibility to create a system in which peasants and indigenous groups could sustain themselves, reproducing their lives and lifeways. The issue of land holds immense importance in Latin America, where the land distribution is the most uneven in the world, an issue dating back to the colonial era and progressively worsened through liberal and neoliberal reforms. At the time of the most recent agrarian census in Bolivia, 686 farm units, just 0.22% of total landowners, owned the *majority* of the agricultural land, while 86% of farms accounted for just 2.4% of agricultural land, making

Bolivia's land distribution rivaling Chile for the most unequal in the world (Weisbrot and Sandoval 2008, 3).

On May 2, 2006, Morales announced a massive land reform which would expropriate unproductive land from large-scale landowners and redistribute it to Bolivia's landless peasant population. In a country of 9 million, as many of 2.5 million Bolivians are landless peasants, many of which have been displaced from the countryside and live on the periphery of urban areas. Thus, the question of land was crucial for Morales to address. (Ezinna 2008, 223)

The prospect of land reform, which threatened to expropriate land from lowland Landifundios (largescale landowners) along with putting an end to the profitable business of land-speculation (Kohl and Bresnahan 2010, 9) led to a swift backlash from the eastern lowlands. This backlash was concentrated in Santa Cruz, the largest department in Bolivia and home to the majority of the country's industrial agriculture (Fig 1). Santa Cruz is among the whitest departments along with the wealthiest, owing to the large-scale agriculture, which thrived amid the commodity booms of the 1990s and 2000s (Soruco, Plata and Medieros 2008).

Bolivia is a highly centralist state, with departmental governments lacking any real power until the election of the first departmental governors in 2005. However Santa Cruz elites had long maintained control over the region through a series of semi-public, non-governmental institutions, centered around the Comité Pro-Santa Cruz (CPSC), a unelected committee of agribusiness and industrial elites (Fabricant 2016, 189). These elites had grown accustomed to holding a privileged position in national politics, and were shaken by the 2005 election of Morales and the MAS, which formed the first majority government in decades.



Fig 1.1: Map of the Departments of Bolivia. Source: Ilgren, E & Ramirez, R & Claros, E & Fernandez, P & Guardia, R & Dalenz, J & Kamiya, Y & Hoskins, John. (2012). Fiber Width as a Determinant of Mesothelioma Induction and Threshold*Bolivian Crocidolite: Epidemiological Evidence from Bolivia*Mesothelioma Demography and Exposure Pathways. Annals of Respiratory Medicine. Ann Resp Med.

The CPSC organized its first protest for regional autonomy in 2004 alongside the waves of counter-neoliberal protests in the highlands, drawing 10s of thousands to the department's

capital, Santa Cruz de la Sierra. The election of Morales heightened the fears of the CPSC, and the Santa Cruz Autonomy movement was born, drawing crowds of as many as 350,000 participants. In a 2006 referendum, 56% of Bolivian voters rejected autonomy, however, 71% in Santa Cruz voted in favor. In 2008, 86% in Santa Cruz voted for autonomy. (Eaton 2011, 296) While the autonomy movement asserted itself as a defense of democracy and the self-determination of “Cruceños” against the impositions of the state, the movements leaders in fact sought to defend the deep inequalities of the department, particularly of land distribution, in the face of the leftist state.

The divide between eastern lowlands and the western highlands was based upon long-standing divisions. The collapse of the highlands’ silver and tin industries in the 1970s, along with the rise of mass agriculture led to a shift of economic power from the highlands to the lowlands. (Eaton 2007, 76) This furthered the production of “two different Bolivias”, divided between the poorer, largely indigenous highlands and the richer, primarily white and mestizaje lowlands. (Eaton, 19-20) The CPSC produced a movement which depicted itself as being towards “democracy” and against the “tyranny” or “authoritarianism” of the central government. However, the autonomy movement has typically been characterized by scholars as a racially charged “backlash against indigenous mobilization,” (Eaton 2007, 71) drawing from “long-standing regional divisions” which have “solidified among the breakdown of the elite-led political party system” (Kirshner 2010, 108).

The majority of studies on the Autonomy movement have focused on its components of ideology and identity construction, often interrogating the movement’s use of performative identity in order to achieve conservative political goals (Fabricant 2009; Gustafson 2006; Centellas 2016). Some have gone so far as to argue that movements like the Santa Cruz

Autonomy Movement, with their proliferation of “spectacularly performative and manifestly symbolic dimensions of culture”, are “post-materialist” movements. (Lowrey 2006. 65). While these studies provide important insights, I argue that in order to understand the autonomy movement’s profound implication on the course of Bolivia’s history, it is necessary to center the very material nature of the movement, which sought control *land* and *nature*. Thus, in this thesis, I argue that the autonomy movement should be considered as a *political ecology movement*, in which regional elites fomented a collective identity in order to defend their preferred socionature.

The idea of socionature, as I use here, is borrowed from Swyngedouw, who insists that in order to transcend the binary formations of nature and society, we must develop a language which maintains the “dialectical unity of the process of change as embodied in the thing itself”(Swyngedouw 1999, 447). While the concept of “socionature” attempts to explain the essential basis which nature plays in the production of society, it does not go so far as to stray into environmental determinism. Rather, as Swyngedouw asserts, the production of socionature is tied up with social power, and “includes both material transformation and the proliferation of discursive and symbolic representations of nature” (Swyngedouw 1999, 447). Thus, the production of socionature transcends the material and also exists within the realm of scientific and political discourse, imaginaries, and meanings of nature (Swyngedouw 1999, 447).

While political ecology has been widely used in the study of social movements, identity and natural resources in Bolivia, particularly with regard to the resource-based protests of the early 2000s “Gas Wars” and “Water Wars” which swept Morales to power, the Santa Cruz Autonomy movement has yet to be studied through a political ecology lens, owing in part to the relative lack of attention to right-wing movements in the field of political ecology and in

scholarship in general. However, in my view, studying the Right through this lens offers important insights, revealing the fundamental socionatural contradictions within these projects. I assert that the defining socionatural relationship of Santa Cruz and its autonomy movement is that of *monocultures*. This refers, most obviously, to the monocultures of soy and other cash-crops which have come to define the Santa Cruz landscape and economy. However, drawing from Shiva's idea of 'Monocultures of the Mind,' I also consider how Santa Cruz has produced homogeneity in other ways. In her essay 'Monocultures of the Mind', Shiva asserts that "monocultures first inhabit the mind, and are then transferred to the ground. Monocultures of the mind generate models of production which destroy diversity and legitimize that destruction as progress, growth and improvement" (Shiva 1993, 7). The Santa Cruz autonomy movement, when studied through a lens of political ecology, demonstrates how monocultures of the mind and the land are contested and territorialized within states that are openly opposed to neoliberalism.

Santa Cruz Autonomy movement leaders argued that Morales went against the "moral constitution of Cruceño agriculture." and threatened the "hard-fought-for, locally governed, politico-economic relations that have allowed the development of capitalist agriculture in Santa Cruz" (Valdivia 2010, 67). Indeed, central to the drive for autonomy is the legal control over land-tenure, which would allow agribusinesses to avoid national redistributive reform. Furthermore, greater regional control over the police would allow the region to enforce crackdowns on social movements that would threaten production -such as landless groups (Eaton 2011, 294). Thus, embedded within the drive for autonomy is a radical demand for a different developmental model that would allow for the consolidation of the land and power in order to promote a capital-intensive mode of agriculture.

Despite the MAS's claim that the autonomy movement had been "defeated economically, politically and militarily" (Eaton 2017, 163), and the relative lack of scholarly attention to the autonomy movement after 2010, studying the Santa Cruz autonomy movement through the lens of political ecology demonstrates the movement's essential successes in not only reproducing its system of monocultures, but extending the scope of its socionatural ideology to the national scale. I will argue that the structures and coalitions of Santa Cruz elites, agribusiness and the popular masses drawn together by the autonomy movement continued to seriously limit Morales's process of change and push him a neoliberal direction. The 2010s were marked by numerous concessions from Morales to Santa Cruz, particularly to industrial agriculture, at the expense of land reform or environmental protection. Morales perceived neoliberal shift in the later years of his presidency was widely critiqued by the national and international left, however I argue that many critics overlook the fundamental importance that Santa Cruz elites and the autonomy movement played in redirecting Morales toward a more capitalist system.

In reframing the Santa Cruz autonomy movement as a political ecology movement, I intend to uncover how processes of homogenization of the environment along with homogenization of people and knowledges are forms of violence which are intimately, and essentially, related. Processes which promote monoculture of the mind and land are often embedded in the state, however the autonomy movement demonstrates how processes of monoculture are contested and legitimated within sub-state spaces through right-wing social movements. I proceed with my interrogation of the Political ecology of the autonomy movement with three interrelated questions, which are more or less divided between my three chapters. First, how did the political ecology of monocultures and the ideologies of the Right come to dominate Santa Cruz? Second, how did the elite-led project of autonomy come to be so deeply

felt and widely supported by diverse populations in Santa Cruz, allowing elites to maintain their territorial dominance? And Third; How were Santa Cruz elites able to rescale their power to the national level through alliances with Morales which allowed them to continue, and expand, their socionatural configuration?

Background to

The system of agriculture in Santa Cruz has heavily influenced its social relations, governance, economy and environment. Furthermore, as the agricultural hotspot of Bolivia, it has a powerful influence over the socionatural conditions of the country as a whole. The consolidation of land in the hands of a small elite through legal and extra-legal means resulted in an issue of landlessness which exists to this day. At best, agrarian elites have taken advantage of the desperation of the mass of landless peasants to supply cheap labor for their estates. At worst, elites maintained “semi-feudal” relations with indigenous inhabitants. Several hundred Guaraní families, an indigenous lowlands group, lived in conditions of “quasi-slavery” through debt-peonage, coercion, or physical violence in Santa Cruz up through the 2000s (Kohl and Bresnahan 2010, 8) .

Since the 1990s, Santa Cruz has seen a significant transition towards monopolizing, highly mechanized and capital-intensive commercial agriculture which has diminished the need for labor. This transition has seen the rise of monocultures of cash crops such as soy, which are produced for the global market rather than local consumption. The high production costs of soy, along with its value on the global market have increased the importance of international capital, leading to a ‘foreignization’ of land along with a marginalization of small-scale producers

(McKay and Colque 2016, 583). Developing Bolivia's 'soy complex' has relied upon 'productive exclusion.' As fewer and fewer producers have the capital on hand to produce soy for the global market, small-scale producers are largely excluded from production (McKay and Colque 2016, 583).

Amid the autonomy movement, building support for a system which excluded so many while benefitting so few required creating a regional identity which was inclusive and vague. The Cruceño, or Camba, identity had been prominently discussed by Santa Cruz elites since the 1950s, and was articulated by elites as a "special mestizaje..... bored out of two noble razas. One side of the lineage is emblemized by the white Spanish conquistador, the other by the dusky tropical (*not* Andean) indigenous maiden," attempting to purify the "primordial tension/ combination of Spaniard and Indian." (Lowrey 2006, 66) This identity had historically been constructed in opposition to that of the highland "colla", who was viewed as indigenous and premodern. However, during the autonomy movement, the regional discourse came to promote the Cruceño identity as something formed by space rather than race, in order to incorporate highland migrant and lowland indigenous constituencies. The identities constructed through the autonomy movement were profoundly successful in "obscuring ongoing power relations and unequal access to modes of production and resource wealth"(Fabricant 2013, 188), giving the movement the pretenses of an ethnic or populist movement while elites could reproduce "regionalized territorial orders." (Gustafson 2006, 352). Lowrey asserts: "Bolivia is today wracked by an intense internal struggle over how to align the nation's 'two bodies': its body politic (the citizenry and their institutions) and its natural body (the land and its resources). It is not surprising that arguments over geography, race, origins and essences are so heated at such a juncture" (Lowrey 2006, 82).

Autonomy serves as a goal which would allow Santa Cruz elites to defend the “moral constitution of Cruceño agriculture.”(Valdivia 2010, 67) which consists of forms of mass agriculture which exclude far more than they benefit. The popular support of this unequal system predicated on the “monoculture of the mind by making space for local alternatives disappear” while also destroying the “very **conditions** for alternatives to exist, very much like the introduction of monocultures destroying the very conditions for very conditions for diverse species to exist.”(Shiva 1993, 12)

I emphasize, however, that the political ecology of the Santa Cruz elites is far from unique to the region; rather, it is an essential piece of the logic of the global Food Regime. “Food regime,” as I use here, comes from food regime analysis, a discipline introduced by Harriet Friedmann in 1987 and further developed by Friedmann and McMichael in 1988. Food regime analysis combines components of political economy, political ecology and historical analysis to explain how relations of food production and consumption have formed the basis of the nation-state system and global capitalism since the 1800s. (Friedmann and McMichael 2008). The food regime concept historicizes the global food system without falling back onto a linear representation of agricultural “modernization,” , while emphasizing its foundational role in capital accumulation and geopolitical relations (McMichael 2009,140). The current food regime, defined by Giménez and Shattuck as the “corporate food regime,” arose in the 1980s and continues to the present. This food regime is characterized by globalized animal protein chains, the increasing significance of agri-fuels, and monopolistic control of the new agricultural “means of production” including genetically modified seeds, chemical inputs and technology which are almost exclusively produced in the Global North (Giménez and Shattuck 2011, 111). Like earlier food regimes, this food regime has centered the logic of accumulation, strongly favoring

accumulation in the global north. However the technologies, configurations and logics have encouraged accumulation of wealth like no food regime before it. Technologies which have been deemed “essential” for competitive production are monopolized by a handful of transnationals, ensuring that these corporations retain a significant share of the surplus from agriculture.

The genius of the system is that it sustains itself; monoculture production, particularly of crops like soy, strips the soil of nutrients. Farmers become dependent on fertilizers. Deforestation from the expansion of the agricultural frontier reduces the ecosystem’s capacity to regulate insect populations, and pests take over crops. Farmers become dependent on pesticides. Farmers who rely on less technologically intensive agriculture are unable to compete with mechanized agriculture on the global market. The effects of climate change increasingly harm production through droughts and floods, pests and desertification, effects which are most strongly pronounced in the global south (Altieri and Pengue 2006, 15). Transnationals sell their genetically modified crops as solution to all of the ills affecting crop production. Entire national agricultures switch to Genetically Modified crops, becoming dependent on seeds whose entire genomes are patented. Once regions switch to GM crops, it is difficult or impossible to switch back; cross pollination of crops means that farmers can be sued for selling seed which was incidentally cross-pollinated with the patented seed. Meanwhile, with local markets flooded with cheap local and foreign foods produced by industrial agriculture, peasant farmers have increasing difficulty in marketing their surplus production. Peasants, along with farm workers displaced by mechanization of agriculture, are increasingly forced to move to urban areas in search of work, entering into the informal economy. With the urbanization of the global population, a greater food supply is needed from a smaller number of suppliers, encouraging the expansion of industrial agriculture (Altieri and Pengue 2006, 17).

Despite claims that industrial agriculture has been necessary to feed the world's growing population, Giménez and Shattuck and others assert that this food regime has also worsened hunger globally. Despite claims that Green Revolution technology and commercialized agriculture have alleviated global hunger, they point out that the number of hungry people on the planet has grown steadily from 700 million in 1986 to 800 million in 1998. The global food crisis arising in 2008, a symptom of the economic crisis not commonly discussed in the global north, caused the global number of hungry people to a historic 1.02 billion; more than 1/6th of the global population (Giménez and Shattuck 2011, 112.)

Given the disastrous effects of the corporate food regime, it is logical that many countries in the global south have promoted national agricultural programs which attempt to retain national food sovereignty. However, the agents behind the corporate food regime have systemically weakened national sovereignty and forced the logic of monoculture on the global south. Neoliberal Structural Adjustment Programs of the 1980s broke down tariffs and price controls while also destroying national agricultural research by countries in the global south. The market component of the current food regime was cemented in the 1995 World Trade Organization "Agreement on Agriculture" (AoA) which restricted the rights of sovereign states to regulate the trade of agricultural goods (Giménez and Shattuck 2011, 111).

In Latin America, production of soy has rapidly expanded since the 1980s, particularly across the Southern Cone countries of Chile, Argentina and Paraguay along with Brazil. The vast majority of Soy is not consumed as food, but rather is fed to cattle, used as agrofuel, or sold as derivatives which are used in processed food. Soy has a distinctly transnational supply chain, tied up in industries ranging from fuels (Biofuels), chemicals (preservatives) pharmaceuticals (antibiotics which allow intensive livestock production), chemicals (preservatives) as well as

food manufacturing, where meat is the most valuable ingredient. (Friedmann and McMichael 2008, 110)

Latin American elites have come to see agro-industry as a tool for modernization throughout the country (Teubal 2009, 18), yet instead the effects have been profits for a few land-owning elites alongside massive dispossession and environmental harm. In South America, the “impoverished and impoverishing nature of monocultures”(Shiva 1993, 5) is readily on display.

Across the border from Santa Cruz the vast state of Matto Grosso, Brazil is governed by longtime governor Blairo Maggi, a right-wing agro-industry billionaire who has been called the “King of Soy.” (Newman 2019). Maggi is emblematic of the increasing power of agroindustry in the Latin American right. The Latin American “New Right,” including figures like Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro, have responded to this moment of profound social and ecological crisis through centering agro-expansionism and agro-extractivism in their visions of national progress, and responding to the resulting social contradictions through authoritarianism and violence. In the Santa Cruz autonomy movement, we can see how neocolonial elites engage in ideological and economic warfare in order to reterritorialize power and land in their favor.

Thus, I suggest that the spread of the food regime has not only increased the stratification of the global population- but numerous studies have also noted the deepening of class, gender and regional inequalities in the global south alongside the transformations of the Green revolution (Giménez and Shattuck 2011, 110-111). Its spread has also *relied* upon existing regional power groups such as those of Santa Cruz, which have maintained their dominance since the colonial era through dominating land and resources, maintaining racial hierarchies, and making subaltern knowledge and cultures invisible. These

elites play an essential role for the transnational corporations of the food regime, who view Latin America's vast amounts of land as a place to accrue profit without consequence.

Whether explicitly or implicitly, the institutions and corporations of the food regime, mostly located in the Global North, encourage Latin American elites to wield their economic and political power to maintain sociospatial arrangements which allow the expansion of monoculture.

Thus, I suggest that the Autonomy movement not only as a regional attempt to maintain power, but part of a larger process which has happened across the continent and around the world. The transnational corporations, governments and institutions of food regime have formed alliances with elites and power groups in the global south, promising them the kind of limitless wealth and power of which they dream.

Alongside waves of indigenous and peasant popular mobilizations of the pink-tide, right wing national elites have had to find new strategies to maintain systems of power. In Bolivia, we can see these new strategies of the right, and of the food regime, in action. In an era where overt authoritarianism is not as feasible a political option for the Latin American Right as it once was (Eaton 2007, 72), and US has shifted its strategy in Latin America to more "soft power" strategies rather than military interventionism (Garvey 2020), the maintenance of capitalism in the highly diverse and highly unequal region has posed challenges for national and international elites.

The Santa Cruz Autonomy movement demonstrates how the right have taken strategies of wielding identity to contest and legitimate control over space from the playbook of left-wing movements and used these tactics to further their own goals. In the case of Santa Cruz, centering identity in their movement was viewed as a way to conceal and maintain their system of monocultures, making dispossession appear democratic.

The autonomy movement has framed itself as in defense of diversity against the centralizing impulse of the state. On the Santa Cruz government website, a quote from Cruceño Gustavo Pinto Mosquiera asserts “the right of a people or nation, like the Camba Nation to have freedom, autonomy from any state, is a natural, positive, rational and human right. No one can deny us the right to see, feel and understand ourselves differently in a diverse and heterogenous world...” (“Ideología Cruceña”, Santacruz.gob.bo; accessed 2021) However, as I argue here and throughout, the autonomy movement’s self-fashioning as being in defense a locally specific people and culture against the centralizing state in fact conceals its desire to destroy diversity, both of people and the environment, thus destroying local specificity. Thus, the Autonomy Movement’s attempts to materially and ideologically homogenize nature can be seen as part of a global process, carried out by interconnected agents of the food regime, in attempt to, as Shiva says, “make diversity disappear from perception, and consequently the world” (Shiva 1993, 5).

While the Latin American Right, often allied with agro-industry, will likely continue to use the precarity of this era to develop authoritarian control and claim that free markets and agro-industry are the key to national development, this moment remains an opportunity for alternatives to be conceived and contested.

Bolivia is home to precious diversity of knowledge, culture and nature which are preserved nowhere else in the world. Filemón Escobar, mining leader and MAS founder asserted in 2014 that with the rise of the MAS “We proclaimed to the world the continued strength, not

just of Andean-Amazonian culture but of the viability of its civilization.”(Kohl and Farthing 2014, 15). This is not merely political rhetoric.

“The people of the rural Andes present a seeming paradox. For over four hundred and fifty years they have been subjected to control by a succession of external rulers: European invaders, then European oriented, colonial elite classes, and finally Hispanicized national dominant classes. All of these have attempted to impose on the rural peoples of the Andes their own cultures and institutions, first those of Spain and then later those of the nascent republics of Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. Yet today, in spite of centuries of pressure from above, many Andean ethnic groups have maintained a way of life- or more specifically, symbolic configurations and complex modes of organization- which is derived from their Andean past and which distinguishes them from the Hispanicized world and of the “modern” classes inhabiting the towns and cities of the three countries. The continuities that characterize Andean rural life are not simply due to a lack of awareness of alternatives or to isolation from the national elites and the mechanisms of the state.”(Rasnake 1988, 4)

At the basis of preservation of Andean civilization has been what Rene Zavaleta Mercado, one of Bolivia’s most important political theorists, calls “the characteristic mode of relation between man and nature”(Zavaleta Mercado 1986, 29); agriculture.

Throughout the colonial period, the Spanish preserved the indirect rule system of the Inca, and by extension maintained the kin-based ayllu system of land distribution, governance and agriculture. According to Zavaleta Mercado, this allowed the basis of Bolivian society to

remain untouched through colonial rule, despite domination by multiple foreign and national governments who imposed their “modernizing” logics.

Thus, Zavaleta Mercado asserts; “A country is always what its agriculture is. Agriculture even today remains the characteristic mode of relation between man and nature, and even when it is said that industry predominates over agriculture, industry in fact functions in the service of this essential human activity.”(Zavaleta Mercado 1986, 29)

These structures exist to this day. Based on the principle of regeneration and diversified systems of agriculture, Andean peasant agricultures push back against the globalizing logic of monocultures and demonstrate an example of locally specific, culturally appropriate and environmentally sustainable agricultures, which some scholars term Agroecology (Altieri, Nicholls and Montalba 2017, 1)

While agroindustry dominates in the lowlands, alternative socionatures are imagined and enacted here as well. One prominent example of this is the Bolivian MST or landless peasant movement, which has drawn inspiration of the Ayllu system in constituting their own forms of redistributive, environmentally sustainable and locally specific agricultures on unused land. (Ezinna 2008).

Peasant agricultures throughout Bolivia offer locally based knowledges that are essential for overcoming the compounding disasters brought on by climate change and the massive dispossession and environmental damages of the global food regime. However in Bolivia, and around across Latin America, peasant agricultures are under attack. While Morales and the MAS came to power vocally supporting landless peasants and local agricultures, their increasing support of agroindustry following the autonomy movement has enabled monoculture to threaten all of Bolivia.

As Zavaleta Mercado states;

“‘if the primary event [in constituting society] is the encounter between individuals and nature, then what is called a mode of production is already ‘a [determinate] mode of expressing their life, a determinate *mode of life*’, so ‘what they are, therefore, coincides with their production; both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce’.”(Zavaleta Mercado 1986, 99).

Mercado highlights the foundational role which agriculture plays in the *mode of life* of societies.

As diverse environments, cultures and agricultures give way to vast monocultures, *how we produce* is becoming increasingly homogenized across the globe.

The growth of agroindustry in Bolivia, predominantly pushed forward by the actors behind the Santa Cruz Autonomy movement, pose a threat to the diverse socionatures in Bolivia, and with that the diverse knowledges and cultures which maintain them. As Shiva says “The disappearance of diversity is also a disappearance of alternatives.... How often in contemporary times total uprooting of nature, technology , communities and entire civilization is justified on the grounds that ‘there is no alternative’. Alternatives exist, but are excluded.” (Shiva 1993, 5).

Central to Shiva’s argument — and my own — is the idea that diversity of knowledge and culture is fundamentally tied to diversity of the environment, and more specifically, diverse ways of transforming or interacting with nature. Bolivia is a pertinent case study of this connection, both due to the importance of the nation’s natural resources, and because of the clash between the MAS’s decolonial project and the elites which cling on to colonial power structures and knowledge. In the post-neoliberal era, where capitalism has reached the far edges of the

globe, the MAS and the social movements which brought it to power demonstrate diverse ways about thinking about the environment which evade the “monoculture of the mind.” The *vivir bien* (living well) principle held by the MAS for example poses a powerful alternative to capitalist modernity, centering the reproduction of society and nature in a way which is “not only post capitalist... but also postsocialist.”(Colletta and Raftopolous 2020, 12). As such, it is important to understand the forces which seek to destroy them.

Chapter Outline

The following chapters will proceed in a manner which is fairly temporally linear, with inputs from different time periods if it is relevant to the topic of discussion. While these chapters are united by a running theme of political ecology, they each explore a different aspect of the conflict in Santa Cruz.

The Second chapter introduces my political ecology framework and tackles the question of how the political ecology of monocultures emerged in Santa Cruz. In other words, how did Santa Cruz’s unequal capitalist system develop while labor and indigeneity held much greater political power in the highlands? I point to two key elements of Santa Cruz’s socionatural history; the system of agriculture and, relatedly, the cultural and political dominance of white economic elites as maintained through the development of “cruceño institutionality”. While the cultural, political and socionatural differences between the highlands and lowlands are in part due to different natural landscapes and resources, I argue these differences are fundamentally tied to the forms of agriculture which have developed in the lowlands, their “determinate *mode of life*.”(Zavaleta Mercado 1986, 99), something which has been deeply influenced by international actors of the food regime.

The Third chapter undertakes the study of the Santa Cruz autonomy movement from 2004-2009 through the lens of political ecology, asking how Santa Cruz elites were able to further the political ecology of monocultures throughout the department through the production of territory. I argue that the movement's success was predicated on creating a homogenous regional identity (a monoculture of the mind) which was achieved through performance, material promises, control over space and violence. the performativity was important as it legitimated the elites' goals to international and national observers, however I argue that the shift to economic warfare through food shortages was the tactic which eventually allowed them to succeed, underscoring the importance of land and agriculture in both the movement's goals and its tactics.

The Fourth chapter looks at the time period from 2010 until the present, analyzing the legacy of the autonomy movement on Bolivia's socionature. While Morales has been widely criticized for his neoliberal shift, less understood is the massive role which the Santa Cruz elites and their autonomy movement played. Throughout the 2010's, the central government's concessions to Santa Cruz elites allowed these elites to maintain and further the socially and environmentally impoverishing practices which make up the "moral constitution of Cruceño agriculture." I argue that the Morales' government series of alliances with Santa Cruz agro-industry constituted a fundamental shift in the project of the MAS towards a project of monocultures, producing a "disappearance of alternatives" for the many Bolivians who imagine and enact alternative socionatural practices.

In Chapter 5, my conclusion considers the implications of the new MAS government for the future of diversity in Bolivia. I assert that the Santa Cruz Autonomy Movement played a key role in deepening "the impoverished and impoverishing nature of monocultures" (Shiva 1993, 5) in Bolivia, in conjunction with global capital. Indeed, while the Santa Cruz Autonomy movement

produced rhetoric around regional specificity, its true goals were in producing regional homogeneity in order to fit into the global capitalist system, thus destroying local socionatures. I draw from post-colonial theory and agro-ecology and argue that thinking beyond our current socio-ecological paradigm- and thinking beyond modernity- must center a diversity of knowledge and particularly the preservation of local socionatural relationships. I conclude that thinking beyond modernity, where “the market is the floor, but also the limit of social equality between people”(Quijano 2000, 217), must center true food sovereignty, not only of nations but of communities, as carried out through the diversified and locally specific methods of agro-ecology.

CHAPTER 2. THE POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF MONOCULTURES IN SANTA CRUZ, BOLIVIA

Political ecology is a useful framework for studying Bolivia, where nature and natural resources have historically played central roles in politics and social movements. Bolivia is one of the world's critical biodiversity hotspots and an essential carbon sink. It is the country with third largest share of the Amazon Basin (Kohl and Farthing 2014, 5). The country is also incredibly rich in natural resources, however, has historically been very poor. Resource extraction has typically benefited a few national elites and international corporations or governments.

While Bolivia is rarely seen as having played a central role in world history, the Spanish discovery of silver mines in the highlands city of Potosí in 1545 played a key role in the development of Spain's mercantile capitalism during the colonial era. Potosí became "a symbol of the wealth of the world, surplus as magic." (Zavaleta Mercado 1986, 32). According to Dussel, one of Latin America's most important post-colonial theorists, the formation of Spain as the first "modern" nation depended principally on the wealth from the silver mines of Potosí (Dussel 2000, 470). While treatment of indigenous peoples by colonial powers was devastating across the world, the treatment of indigenous people in Potosí was especially brutal. Millions are thought to have died in the Potosí mines (Kohl 2012, 225). Healey asserts; "Spanish Colonialism became entirely dependent on the super exploitation of indigenous labor for its mining and the agricultural production needed to support it" (Healey 2014, 87). The Spanish sought to replicate the Inca system of indirect rule, along with the kin-based ayllu structure of social, political and land use governance. Groups of indigenous people were subdivided into

encomiendas, work units which were forces to provide labor for the colonizers (Healey 2014, 87).

After national independence, Bolivia's natural resources continued to largely benefit foreigners, along with a narrow band of national elite. Bolivia's tin was essential to the US during World War II, while its natural gas reserves, some of the largest on the continent, became dominated by multinational corporations amid neoliberal reforms of the 1980s (Kaup 2014, 1839). This combination of factors has long led many Bolivians to feel that they have been unjustly robbed of their resources. As a result, natural resources play a key role in Bolivian social movements and politics, including the so called "gas wars" against the privatization of natural gas bringing Morales to power (Kohl and Farthing 2012, 225). Kohl and Farthing sum this up as "In the Bolivian imaginary, resources appear to be imbued with almost magical properties and have long been seen as possessing the potential to solve the country's economic problems." (Kohl and Farthing 2012, 226) They assert that the inordinate power of natural resources stems from the disparity between the country's resource wealth along with the high prevalence of poverty. This disparity, coupled with a national memory of colonial and neo-colonial looting, they argue has served as "the most successful narrative over the past 60 years to mobilize the population to achieve pro-poor change." (Kohl and Farthing 2012, 225)

Despite the potentially unifying power of the resource nationalist frame, resource conflict has also caused numerous subnational conflicts (Kohl and Farthing 2012, 226), and regionalism plays an important role in Bolivia. Bolivian scholar José Luis Roca stated in his 1979 book; "The history of Bolivia is not the history of class struggle. It is instead the history of regional struggles." (Centellas 2016, 260)

While the resource nationalist movements concentrated in the highlands which brought Morales to power have been studied with a political ecology lens, considerably less attention has been given to the political ecology of the lowlands.

In this chapter, I introduce Political Ecology and explain why it is a useful framework to understand the Santa Cruz autonomy movement. From there I delve into the history of Santa Cruz, and uncover how Santa Cruz's socionature has been constituted, and how this lay the groundwork for the autonomy movement.

Political Ecology Background

Political ecology, more than being a specific discipline or theoretical framework or methodology, refers to a number of themes. These themes, according to McCarthy, include access to and control over resources, issues of marginality and identity, issues of scale and integration into international markets, property rights, livelihood issues along localized histories, culture and meanings around nature and natural resources. Many political ecology studies are situated in the Global South, meaning that the dynamics of colonial and post-colonial legacies are relevant. (McCarthy 2001, 1283)

As political ecology is a theoretically diverse, multidisciplinary field, I specifically am borrowing the framework of McCarthy's study on the Wise Use movement in the American West. McCarthy's insights from studying a right wing, relatively pro-capitalist movement which is situated in the first world, all traits which are uncommon in political ecology studies, have been helpful for my understanding of Santa Cruz. The Wise Use movement defined itself as a grassroots social movement rooted in regional culture, responding to overly intrusive outsiders

and a supposedly distant federal government. Wise Use members claimed the right to use and occupy federal land however they pleased based on historical precedent and economic necessity. As such, their primary adversaries were the federal government and the environmentalists which sought to protect the land. The movement took on strong populist overtones and highly valued the right to self-determination. (McCarthy 2001, 1283)

The Wise Use movement, much like the Santa Cruz autonomy movement, was based on a geographically bound identity with its own ‘moral economy.’ This idea of a moral economy, defined as an economy based on the idea of a shared set of moral values and norms within an in-group, often arises as “defensive alternatives to capitalist modernity” (McCarthy 2001, 1290). However while moral economies can be alternatives to capitalist market relations, they also can defend certain accepted market relations. For example, members of the Wise Use movement sought to protect economic interests such as logging on federal lands, and losses of access to land were seen both as moral violations and economic losses (McCarthy 2001, 1291).

The moral economy demonstrated by the Wise Use movement was “not about survival, redistribution or risk minimization, as most moral economies are,” but did offer a coherent Moral framework for the use of federal lands, consisting of the ideas that federal lands exist for the primary benefit of adjacent rural communities which supposedly rely on them. (McCarthy 2001, 1291) While many authors have seen Moral economies as by definition precapitalist, McCarthy asserts that capitalist modernity involves ongoing struggles over nature, including “including ongoing resistance to the perennial dynamics of capitalism in the form of newly articulated moral economies.” (McCarthy 2001, 1291) As such moral economies such as that used by the Wise Use movement work simultaneously in defending capitalism and challenging it.

In Santa Cruz, elites seek to protect capitalist social relations through regional autonomy. However, a “moral economy” has formed in elites and non-elites alike, and was weilded as the basis of the autonomy movement. This ‘moral economy’ asserts that economic success of the department is beneficial to everyone regardless of class, even if the historical record of inequality within the department says otherwise. It also speaks to specific regional ideas of nature and how it should be used, which I argue is based on a Eurocentric, technocratic view of nature which is globally dominant. While imbued in a sense of regional tradition, the nature which Santa Cruz elites attempt to produce is fundamentally influenced by western ideology.

Political ecology has been criticized for being “politics without ecology,” (Walker 2005, 73) in that it is often concerned solely with political battles over land and resources with little focus on the role which nature plays in the production of society. In an attempt to remedy this, I find Swyngedouw’s development of the concept of “socionature” to be helpful. In historical materialist thought, nature simply provides the foundation from which society produces nature. However, Swyngedouw rebukes the notion that nature is simply “substratum for the unfolding of social relations.”(Swyngedouw 1999,446) He uses the term socionature do demonstrate the internal dialectic between nature and society, which he asserts are mutually constitutive. He states: “In brief, both society and nature are produced, and are hence malleable, transformable, and potentially transgressive” (Swyngedouw 1999, 447). In particular, I focus on the role of agriculture in the divergent development of Santa Cruz from Andean Bolivia, and relatedly, the development of the regional elite and their hegemony over the culture and politics of the region.

While understanding the socioenvironmental ideologies and moral economies which have arisen in Santa Cruz is a central concern of mine, I also am concerned with how numerous scales of environmental regulation, policy and ideology operate in Santa Cruz, particularly as trends of

neoliberalism and the food regime play out on broader scaled. My focus on agriculture in Santa Cruz necessitates an understanding of how environmental use and regulation occur at multiple scales. As Food Regime theory articulates, Agroindustry has been a key mode of market penetration in countries in the global south, along with a tool of geopolitical control.

Thus while Swyngedouw's view of nature and society being mutually constitutive is helpful, it's essential to understand natures or societies as not merely being contained by, and constituted within the borders of a state or region. In order to avoid the "territorial trap," I draw from regulation theory in my analysis of Santa Cruz. Regulation theory considers the ways that institutional configurations involving resource rights, conservation, social norms and environmental management "mediate the metabolic relationship between nature and society, and in so doing serve to stabilized environmental and social regulation within a given regime of accumulation" and thus respond to "social and ecological contradictions of capitalism." (Perreault 2008, 151). Yet as "regimes of accumulation" are increasingly transnational, democratically elected local and state governments are increasingly disempowered to put into effect environmental policies which satisfy their constituencies. In more recent years, political ecologists have been concerned with the scales at which environmental governance operates and are contested, particularly as environmental governance has been widely rescaled amid neoliberalism. Thus, these theorists recognize that local environmental politics, imaginaries and "moral economies", and state-level environmental policy and their outcomes are often limited or determined by international "institutional structures of late capitalism" (Perreault 2008, 152).

The result has been in countries in the global south have limited ability to enact environmental policies. This is particularly true in countries like Bolivia with economies dependent on primary exports such as natural gas. According to Ong, Neoliberalism has also led

to flexibilization of not conceptions of sovereignty and citizenship (Ong 2004, 76), resulting in what she calls “graduated sovereignty.” (Ong 2004, 78) Graduated sovereignty describes how if “emerging countries” wish to be relevant in the global market, they must offer up certain state spaces, environments and peoples to the impact, and often harm, of the market. Even governments who do not embrace neoliberal ideology- she gives the example of the authoritarian governments of southeast Asia- must selectively embrace aspects of graduated sovereignty if they wish to be relevant to the global market (Ong 2004, 79).

The case of the Santa Cruz demonstrates how neoliberalism finds strongholds in regions with elite dominance over space and nature. Yet the question remains; how did Santa Cruz become a stronghold of capitalism while socialist and indigenous values gained immense political currency in the highlands?

A (Socio)Natural History of Santa Cruz, Bolivia

Rene Zavaleta Mercado, one of Bolivia’s most influential political theorists, stated “A country is always what its agriculture is. Agriculture even today remains the characteristic mode of relation between man and nature, and even when it is said that industry predominates over agriculture, industry in fact functions in the service of this essential human activity.”(Zavaleta Mercado 1986, 29) Yet while asserting that the environment is a significant element in the production of society, Zavaleta Mercado clarifies that it is “the *modification* of the land and not the land itself, even if the land has determined its modification.”(Zavaleta Mercado 1986, 228) In this vein, in order to understand the set of institutional and social power relations in Santa Cruz, one must look to which land has been modified, or transformed by various actor.

Santa Cruz's importance both ecologically and economically have made both its environmental and cultural or political changes subject to considerable international scholarly attention. However, these two components have rarely been brought into conversation. As I argue here and throughout, the history of Santa Cruz's politics and economy cannot be told without its natural history and vice-versa. In the following section I will give a background to Santa Cruz's history in order to explain how Santa Cruz's sociosocionature has been produced.

Santa Cruz's socionature consists of concrete socio-environmental relations, as mediated through laws, institutions, economic processes and extralegal violence. However it also consists of *knowledge, symbols and meanings* of nature. The highly capitalist, unequal social relations of Santa Cruz and the connected environmental degradation are protected by a hegemonic knowledge system which posits reproduction of nature and society as secondary concerns to economic development. This has been proliferated through regional hegemonies, but also deeply influenced by international actors such as the World Bank who have imposed western values of nature through private property laws and forms of development which favor industrial agriculture.

While the Santa Cruz Autonomy movement can be seen as a movement of elites attempting to protect their interests from the central state, the Bolivian state that played the fundamental role in the formation of such regional elites, and the capitalist agriculture that enriches them (Valdivia 2010, 69). Santa Cruz was not always the economic powerhouse it is today. For the first half of the 20th century, Bolivia's most valuable resources, tin and silver, were mined in the highlands while the lowlands were sparsely populated. A small group of regional elites had arisen from the rubber boom from 1880 to 1914, however the relative

isolation and lack of roads had prevented significant development in the region (Soruco, Plata and Medieros 2008, 57). The capital from the rubber boom was used by these elites in the consolidation of large-scale estates, where they used coerced labor to produce goods for regional markets (Eaton 2007, 73). These elites maintained “semi-feudal” relationships with lowlands indigenous people, upholding conditions of “quasi-slavery” through debt-peonage, coercion, or physical violence. Several hundred Guaraní families remained in these conditions until the 2000s (Kohl and Bresnahan 2010, 8).

Development initiatives created by the United States in the 1940s encouraged an expansion of the agricultural frontier in the lowlands, along with recommending the population be shifted ‘from the poor lands of the Altiplano to the fertile lands of the east.’(McKay and Colque 2015, 583). However significant change in the lowlands did not take place until the Bolivian Revolution of 1952, in which the revolutionary party, the MNR, attempted to integrate the remote region through increases in public spending and loan (Centellas 2016, 260).

Contemporary patterns of land ownership in Santa Cruz trace back to the MNR’s Agrarian Reform Act of 1953, which redistributed land to a small number of indigenous peasants in the highlands, yet in the lowlands merely only opening up land to be consolidated. The then-sparsely populated lowlands were the target of “internal colonization” which promoted migration of the poor from the Altiplano to the lowlands through granting deeds to small plots of land to landless Andean campesinos. (Fabricant 2010, 92) Furthermore, it granted 500-50,000 acres to “capitalist entrepreneurs”, local elites with close ties to the political parties in power (Valdivia 2010, 69). This law, Bolivian scholars suggest, was a products of the modernist developmental ideologies of its time, which viewed capitalism and “modernized” agriculture as the sole way to overcome

the “feudal” colonial stage and eventually achieve socialism. (Soruco, Plata and Medieros 2008, 58)

Thus, while the revolution broke up large-scale landholdings in the highlands and redistributed this land to peasants, along with offering incentives for peasants to resettle on unused lands in the lowlands, it primarily prioritized public investment in capitalist agriculture in the lowlands, while “leaving the indigenous communities to their fate” (Soruco, Plata and Medieros 2008, 61).

The MNR viewed the United States as strategic partners in their development of the lowlands. While the US had a strongly counter-revolutionary influence on Latin America at the time, the MNR viewed them as a country that would “finance the constitution of an agrarian bourgeoisie”(Soruco, Plata and Medieros 2008, 61). Plata argues that the Bolivian revolution was the only genuine social revolution to which the United States “provided early and steady support.” In the 1950s, Bolivia was the country to which the United States granted the second most economic aid per capita after Israel. Surprisingly given the radical land reforms produced by the Bolivian revolution (Eaton 2007, 73), the US proved itself “deeply committed to making the Bolivian revolution ‘work.’” (Soruco, Plata and Medieros 2008, 62-63). Central to this commitment was the idea that the US held that land distribution in the highlands was a means to the end of both reducing communist influence in the country and constructing an agro-industrial bourgeoisie (Soruco, Plata and Medieros 2008, 63). Between 1955 and 1960, the Bolivian state focused resources on the Inter-American Agricultural scheme, a U.S. funded agricultural research project which promoted mechanized, large-scale agricultural infrastructure in Santa Cruz. By and large, the elites who were viewed as partners in the development of agro-industry in the region were the same elites who had maintained power and privilege through controlling vast tracts of land since the colonial era (Valdivia 2010, 69).

Despite the MNR's role in constituting the agrarian bourgeoisie, Santa Cruz elites felt threatened by the centralizing power of the socialist state, which had made departmental governments essentially powerless and nationalized extractive industries. Out of this concern, elites began constructing and reworking the regional "Cruceño" or "Camba" identity. In the late 1950s, the new "Camba" identity was born. "A man of the people remarkable only for his relaxed, hospitable bonhomie, this new, mixed blood camba (like the old, indigenous camba) was no aristocrat. While he might not be lily-white, his parentage was nothing to be ashamed of – particularly when contrasted with a nearby alternative..."(Lowrey 2006, 68). The camba identity was contrasted to the highlands "colla" or "kolla," a largely pejorative term to refer to Andean indigenous people (Lowrey 2006, 68).

In attempt to create an epic history for this regional identity, Santa Cruz elites began selectively appropriating aspects of lowland indigenous history and culture. In the 1950s, Santa Cruz's scholars seized upon an obscure 1917 article by a Swedish ethnologist which described an encounter between the lowland Guaraní people and the Inca empire at the foothills of the Andes in the early 16th century. This essay was cast as proof of Guaraní 'resistance' to Andean expansion, by extension bolstering the narrative of the lowlands as being oppressed by the highlands. (Lowrey 2006, 29)

The agrarian reforms of the MNR produced a "dual agrarian structure on the agricultural frontier" (Crabtree and Whitehead 2008, 19). The unequal land distribution between the Andean colonists and the large-scale producers of the lowlands (along with the central governments near total ignorance of lowland indigenous people) produced distinct agrarian classes. "Small producers" produced for the national market while "large producers" were oriented toward export agriculture (Valdivia 2010, 69). The consolidation of the landowning and agro-industrial

oligarchy in Santa Cruz and their organization around a number of non-governmental institutions marked the beginnings of “one of the country’s most important structural conflicts”(Crabtree and Whitehead 2008, 19) between the lowlands and the highlands.

To carry forth their central development plan, the MNR essentially eliminated departmental governments. This gave rise to one of the most distinctive features of Santa Cruz society: the salience of the Comité Pro Santa Cruz (CPSC). The CPSC was founded by founder revolutionary, proto-fascist university students who used the civic committee to oppose redistributive policies of the MNR (Eaton 2007, 76). In the 1950s, their first project was defending the department’s claim to oil royalties, which they used to create a number of public services in the department, providing significant legitimacy for the group (Eaton 2017 146). In absence of democratic departmental governments, the CPSC rapidly became a place where business and agriculture elites coalesced to defend their “regional interests” from the central government. While officially non-governmental and non-partisan, the CPSC has long been populated almost exclusively with white business elites, and affiliated with right-wing interests and groups, including the *Unión Juvenil Cruceñista (UJC)* (Cruceñista Youth Union), which still exists to this day and functions as what Eaton terms the “shock troops” of the CPSC (Eaton 2017 146). As government existed exclusively at the state and municipal level, thus the unelected CPSC president emerged as department of Santa Cruz’s most powerful official, a status which the CPSC maintained long maintained through suppression of local elections (Eaton 2017, 146).The CPSC forms the foundation of “la institucionalidad cruceña”, which refers to a number of affiliated private institutions which came to fill a number of governmental roles (Eaton 2017, 147)., taking advantage of the weak capacity of the state to weave elite hegemony into the social and spatial fabric of society.

The MNR's policies in agribusiness and centralization gave rise to conditions which facilitated the military dictatorship of Hugo Banzer, a cruceño himself, from 1971 to 1978. State-led capitalism under the military dictatorship of Banzer increased the power of Cruceño elites within their region and the nation as a whole, while furthering the divide between large and small-scale producers in Santa Cruz (Valdivia 2010, 69). Banzer benefited from close relationships with the agrarian elite and enriched them with more land. Between 1952 and 1996, 55 million acres were distributed to a few thousand elite landowners while hundreds of thousands of campesinos existed on only 45 million acres (Fabricant 2010, 92). The growth of large-scale, export-oriented agriculture under Hugo Banzer resulted in a parallel increase in demand for labor. Workers largely came from the highland departments, which had high unemployment rates at the time due to the faltering mining industry. High labor demand in the lowlands resulted in a shift of the landless population from the highlands to the lowlands. By 1976, 63% of salaried workers in Bolivia were located in the lowlands and 45% in the department of Santa Cruz (Valdivia 2010, 70).

For elites, the growing economic power of the department justified the sense of racial and cultural supremacy over highlanders. The sense of difference from and superiority to highland Bolivia took on a geographic imaginary. Cruceño scholars argued that the foothills on the eastern flanks of the Bolivian Andes formed the “natural boundary” between the Highlands and lowlands. Many Cruceño scholars argued that the department's geography, along with its ethnic composition, made Santa Cruz more “naturally” aligned with Paraguay than Andean Bolivia (Lowrey 2006, 67).

The idea of “natural” divisions between peoples that were developed to justify regional superiority also were used to justify the development of hierarchies within the region. Drawing

from Gramsci's theory of hegemony, Valdivia asserts that hegemony is both produced and locatable in certain individuals and institutions, yet also relies on the majority's coerced consent to inequality, which is produced and maintained through the creation of social classes. In Santa Cruz, agrarian classes were justified by "natural" cultural, racial and economic differences between the groups (Valdivia 2010, 68). Landless farm workers, many of which came from the highlands, were depicted as less hard working and economically astute as a justification for their lower social status (Valdivia 2010, 68).

Kaup and others critiques the idea that the socioeconomic conditions of a region are solely created by transnational corporations and national elites without focus on the impact of labor. He argues that labor has played a significant role in shaping Andean Bolivia through the mining unions which formed a key constituency of the 1952 revolution and subsequent political ecology movements (Kaup 2014, 1836). The focus on labor highlights a key aspect of the divergent politics and forms of development in the highlands and lowlands. Industrial agriculture of Santa Cruz created conditions in which labor was relatively disempowered. With a large number of landless peasants that increased under the dictatorships of the 1970s and early 80s, farm workers were easily replaceable, while the spatially diffuse nature of farm labor made organizing difficult. The weakening of labor in the region increased during the neoliberal period, in which agriculture rapidly industrialized and made much agrarian work obsolete.

Agrarian Change in the Neoliberal Era

At the time of the First National Agricultural Census in 1950, 4 percent of all agricultural units controlled more than 82 percent of surveyed land surface. By 1984, when the most recent

agricultural census was taken, land distribution was even more unequal; 3.9 percent of all farm units were over 100 hectares in size and occupied 91 percent of all farm surface surveyed.”(Weisbrot and Sandoval 2008, 2) In 1985, in response to high fiscal deficits, the Bolivian government implemented the free market “New Economy”, opening production and services to foreign investors. This resulted in an influx of foreign capital, specifically from Argentina, Brazil and the US. The subsequent “internationalization” of the lowlands saw agrarian capitalists turning towards foreign investors rather than the state to support their production (Valdivia 2010, 71).

Foreign investors further focused funds on large scale agricultural production, leaving smaller landowners increasingly marginalized. Beyond the opening of the lowlands to foreign capital, the neoliberal era also saw the increasing input of IFIs (International Financial Institutions) including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Inter-American Bank over the governance of nature. These IFIs promoted, nearly universally, deforestation and land appropriation in the pursuit of mass production of soy and other cash crops. Significantly, the World Bank’s Lowlands project financed new “areas of expansion” east of Santa Cruz, encouraging the appropriation and clearing of land used by the Ayoreo, Guaraní and Guarayos people, and facilitating the vertical integration of soy. USAID implemented the PL-480 program which promoted seed and technological improvements which reduced labor requirements. (Valdivia 2010, 71)

Since the 1990s, Santa Cruz has seen a significant transition towards monopolizing, highly mechanized and capital-intensive commercial agriculture which has diminished need for labor. This transition has seen the rise of cash crops such as soy, which are produced for the global market rather than local consumption. The high production costs of soy, along with its

value on the global market have increased the importance of international capital, leading to a ‘foreignization’ of land along with a marginalization of small-scale producers. (McKay and Colque 2016, 583) This “neoliberal period” was marked by mass forest clearing across Latin America. Between 1990 and 2000, Bolivia lost an average of 270,400 hectares of forest per year or an average annual deforestation rate of 0.43 percent. Between 2000 and 2005, the rate of forest change increased to 0.45 percent per year.”(World Bank 1995, 6)

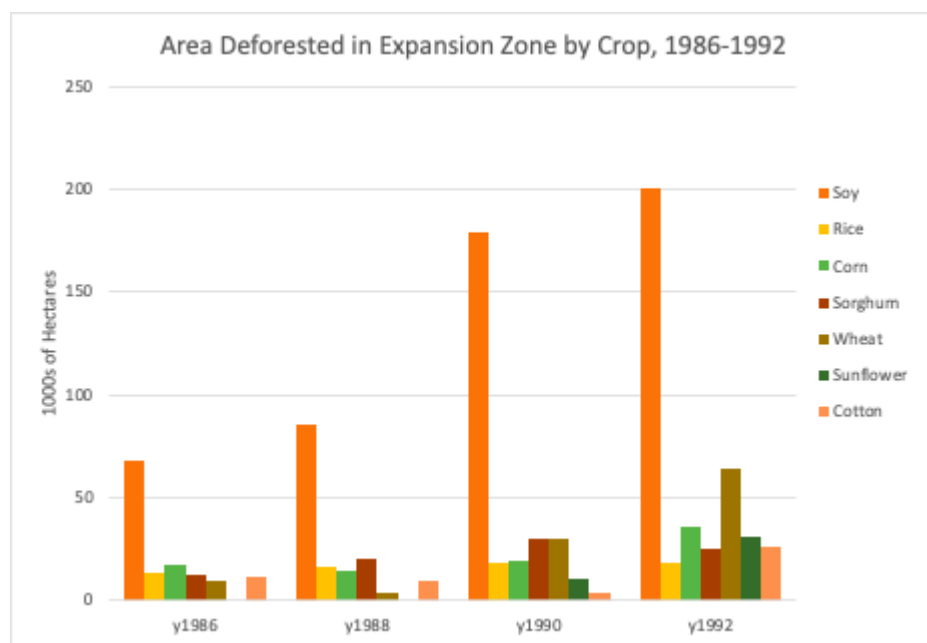


Figure 2.1. Deforested area by Crop. (Data from McKay and Colque 2016)

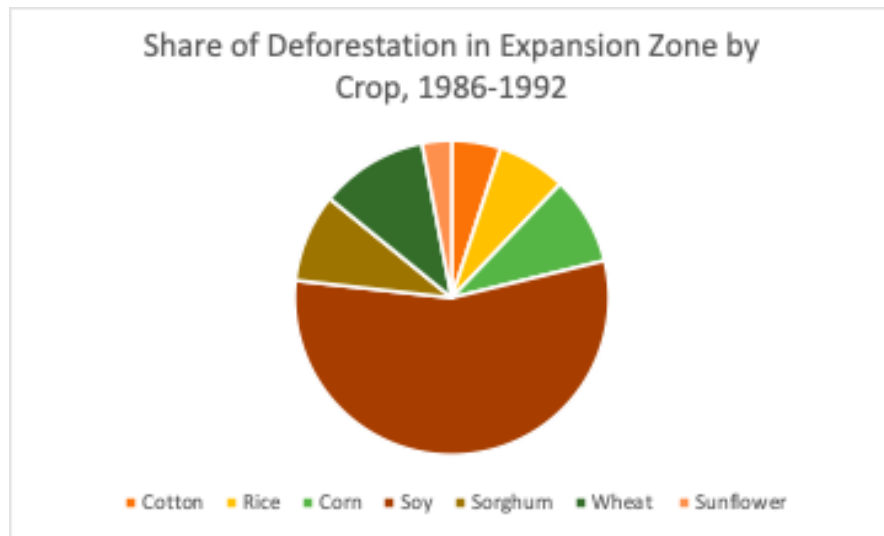


Figure 2.2. Share of deforestation by crop, 1986-1992 (Data from McKay and Colque 2016).

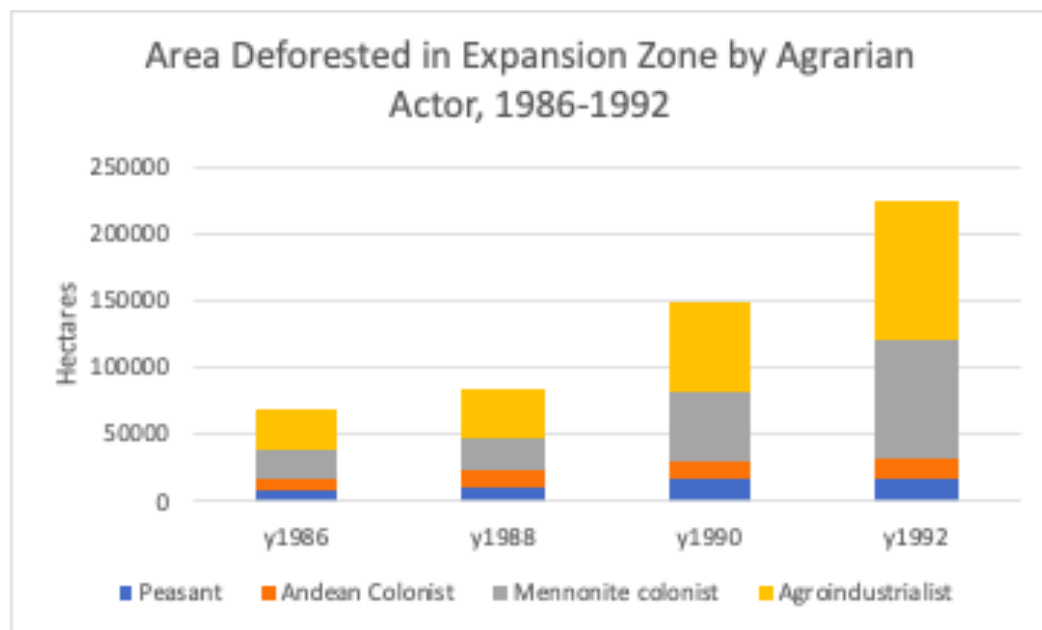


Figure 2.3. Area deforested in Santa Cruz by Agrarian Actor (Data from McKay and Colque 2016)

One of the most important factors behind deforestation in 1990's in Santa Cruz was the World Bank's \$56.4 million "Lowlands of the East Project" from 1990-1997. This project

attempted to increase agricultural export earnings through several objectives. First, lands east of the Rio Grande called “Expansion Zones” were sold to some large-scale landowners and many foreign landholders. Loans were provided to these landowners for machinery for land clearing, cultivation, harvest storage facilities and road improvements. Finally, barriers to export were dismantled through the regional trade blocs such as the Andean pact and the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) (Redo 2013, 70)

From 1990 to 2010, soybean production in Santa Cruz increased more than eight times, from 232,743 to 1,917,150 tons. Furthermore, from 1990 to 2007, cultivated land in Santa Cruz increased five-fold from 413,320 to 1,821,631 hectares, nearly one million hectares of which was used for Soybeans (McKay and Colque 2015, 587).

Soy production relies on heavy external inputs, thus heavy capital investment. The pesticides and fertilizers, genetically modified seeds, heavily machinery, along with storage and processing facilities are increasingly concentrated in the hands of few international corporations. Furthermore, it requires significant investment from the farmer (McKay and Colque 2015, 585). The implications of this in Santa Cruz is that the small and medium-sized farmers who often got land through government redistributive reforms, are pushed out of the market by the more valuable soy, and many are forced to rent out their land to large-scale landowners with the capital to invest in soy (McKay and Colque 2015, 585). To this day, the concentration of land in Bolivia among a very small group of landowners is among the most unequal in the entire world, only exceeded in Latin America by Chile (Weisbrot and Sandoval 2008, 4).

While neoliberal policies have been rightfully blamed for the agrarian transformation, these macro-level influences were enacted through local actors. As Redo asserts, individual producers play a key role in decisions around land use and forms of agriculture, reflecting

cultural values, personal knowledge, and local norms (Redo 2013, 69). Indeed, that the logic of monocultures and agroindustry were accepted in Santa Cruz depended not only on neoliberal policies, but also locally specific ideologies, hierarchies, and socionatures. In Santa Cruz, the neoliberal logic of agroindustry and modernization rested upon a much older “Darwinian logic” which had promoted white supremacy of indigenous people since colonial times (Soruco, Plata and Medieros 2008, 102). Crabtree and Whitehead argue that in Bolivia, racialized hierarchies have changed over time, through different modes of government. While during the colonial period, Spanish asserted their supremacy with appeals to religion (“God was on the Spaniard’s side.”), the first century of the republic shifted towards “scientific” appeals to Social Darwinism (Crabtree and Whitehead 2008, 18). The method of determining hierarchy, I argue, shifted again in the post-revolution period in Santa Cruz, in which ideas of social Darwinism mixed with burgeoning neoliberal logics of productivity and modernity. The Santa Cruz elites came to see themselves as exemplars of modernity, while the inequalities in their department were chalked up to natural differences, particularly between so-called Cambas and Kollas. They bolstered their defense of their system of agriculture with neoliberal logic that large-scale, monocultural production is the most efficient and profitable use of land.

Santa Cruz elites have come to see themselves as self-made entrepreneurs who are subjugated by the centralist state. However, Weisbrot and Sandoval challenge this notion, noting that Santa Cruz agrarian elites have benefited from significant subsidies for diesel fuel, which is necessary for farmers to transport their crops. This diesel subsidy makes up 6% of Bolivia’s federal budget, 40% of which (about \$135 million) goes to Santa Cruz. (Weisbrot and Sandoval 2008, 5) In 2008, the Finance ministry announced that they were considering the possibility of eliminating the diesel subsidy, posing a serious threat to agro-elites which relied on. Thus, elites

were motivated to advocate for autonomy “not only to prevent land reform directly, but to ensure that the provincial government would continue to subsidize their production even if these subsidies were found, on economic grounds, to be wasteful, inefficient, and/or regressive in terms of income redistribution.”(Weisbrot and Sandoval 2008, 5)

While during the neoliberal period Santa Cruz elites had little to complain about economically, they felt indignant about their lack of political power in the central government following Bolivia’s return to democracy. While Santa Cruz had little reason to pursue total autonomy due to the benefits they received from the central government, the CPSC began organizing autonomy protests in the 1980s in order to demand greater power for their department. On February 26, 1986, the first gran cabildo (large council) took place at the foot of the statue of Christ the Redeemer in downtown Santa Cruz, where many later autonomy protests would take place. The “solemn act” was described as an “Oath to Santa Cruz and autonomy.” Framed as an oath to God, the Oath stated “Do you swear by God, by Santa Cruz.... to fight to preserve our moral values against crime and drug trafficking, seeking by all means justice, freedom and the consolidation of our regional identity? Do you swear by God and by Santa Cruz: Fight for our autonomy, that for justice and history will correspond to us?”(Daboub Arrien, “The Pajutú Revolution”; accessed 2021).

This act was only attended by a few thousand people, however its rhetoric served as a precursor for the autonomy protests of the 2000s, demonstrating the elite-based regional identity and ideology which was gaining power in the region

Monocultures, Power and Alternatives

The history of Santa Cruz from the 1950s through the neoliberal period demonstrates the significant role which the state played in developing monocultures in the department, both in terms of encouraging the development of agroindustry, and through indirectly allowing the development the Cruceño “monoculture of the mind” produced by elite dominated, non-democratic political system of non-governmental institutions. Santa Cruz’s developments during this period, however, followed broader trends of the food regime and neoliberalism which limited the ability of states to carry out their own forms of agricultural development. Across Latin America, the rise of neoliberalism and the modernization process harmed the political power of land-related issues, while bolstering agro-industry and property rights of large landowners. Neoliberalism has undone many of the agrarian reforms of the 20th century which protected small and medium producers, rural workers, indigenous communities and the environment. Since the early 90s, almost all Latin American countries have “freed” or “flexibilized” their agrarian institutions to promote the treatment of the land as a commodity (Teubal 2009, 10).

The soil of Santa Cruz is naturally fertile, but it has been impoverished over years of monocultures. Soy can only be grown in a monoculture for so many years before irreparably diminishing the soil. Because of this, the input of capital towards the fertilizers, pesticides and machinery required for profitable soy production is significant. Soy’s capital intensive, labor disperse nature along with its ability to diminish over time makes soy act similarly to an extractive resource. Much like extractive resources like oil and natural gas, the production of soy benefits few while having wider ecologically and socially degrading impacts. Furthermore, it promises only short-term profits, with limited potential for sustainable and socially responsible development in Santa Cruz (Soruco, Plata and Medieros 2008, 75). Soruco, Plata and Medieros, scholars at the Tierra institute in Eastern Bolivia assert “the Cruceño Development model” has “no positive results, except in short periods of time and in the hands of few elite

families”(Soruco, Plata and Medieros 2008, 79). For Santa Cruz elites, this does not matter. As Shiva asserts: “Monocultures spread not because they produce more, but because they control more. The expansion of monocultures has more to do with politics and power than with enriching and enhancing systems of biological production”(Shiva 1993, 7).

Despite the elite hegemony in Santa Cruz, alternatives socionatural imaginaries exist in the department. A prominent example is the Bolivian MST, or landless peasant movement, which employs diversified and collective models of agriculture on unused land. Ezinna describes visiting an MST settlement which was created in 2000. *Los Sotos* was taken over by around 75 landless Bolivians who had worked for years on large haciendas and banded together to take over 1000 hectares. The land had been abandoned after being stripped for lumber and when the settlers arrived, the soil was barren. Ezinna notes that the soil at *Los Sotos* was rich, richer than soil he had seen anywhere else in the region. The settlers grew corn, wheat, soy and potatoes along with rearing livestock. Labor was shared and so was the money earned from sales, which was completely shared between the settlers. (Ezinna 2008, 220) At the time of writing, in 2008, Ezinna states there were over 100 similar MST settlements in Bolivia, all of which followed a similar collective model and nearly of which had experienced violence at the hand of paramilitaries sent by local landowners (Ezinna 2008, 220).

Violence against the landless goes beyond defense of property; Ezinna points out the important fact that landless peasants are a key source of labor for large landowners; “The fact that poor landless peasants are the backbone of the export economy does not escape the attention of the latifundistas, who recognize the threat squatter exoduses pose to their labor supply. When their laborer’s defect from the latifundio labor force to squat other lands landowners typically

unite to attack these settlements, irrespective of whether or not it is their land that is being occupied.”(Ezinna 2008, 226)

In the following chapters, I hope not only to demonstrate the ways in which monocultures have been embedded and fought for in Santa Cruz, but to fight against the “disappearance of alternatives” created by monocultures of the mind (Shiva 1993, 5) by highlighting alternative ways of thinking which produce divergent visions for the future.

As I have argued in this chapter, the history of Santa Cruz and its agriculture reveals how the autonomy movement was in fact over uses and meanings of land and nature. While the agrarian elites fomented support for autonomy to defend their economic interests, many ordinary people also participated in the movement. Some saw the movement as a way to maintain regional dominance over national affairs and, perhaps less consciously, to re-assert racial supremacy in a moment of historical reckoning. Yet others, including lowlands indigenous groups and peasants, saw regional autonomy as a way to further material interests as the central state had historically ignored them. This leaves the question of how this movement drew together such disparate groups and found support among a majority within Santa Cruz. In my next chapter I will look into the powerful element which brought all these groups together- territory.

CHAPTER 3. TERRITORY, IDENTITY AND RACISM IN THE SANTA CRUZ AUTONOMY MOVEMENT

As established in the previous chapter, the Santa Cruz Autonomy movement arose from a system of interrelated institutions and practices of control over land and nature which are woven into the fabric of Santa Cruz's *socionature*. In this chapter, I turn to the period of time between 2004 and 2010 in which the autonomy movement was most active, focusing on the role of *territory* in the movement's rhetoric and goals.

Latin America has experienced widespread internal political instability since the nationalist period, however the region also boasts a remarkable continuity of states and their territories. While Europe and other continents feature nationalist and separatist conflicts which periodically alter the political map, Latin America countries have remained largely the same since the national independence. (Mitre 2014, 3). While the external composition of Latin American states has remained largely unchanged, in the last several decades, Latin America has seen an explosion of territorial and regional movements in which groups vie for greater territorial control at the sub-state level (Bryan 2012), along with neoliberal decentralizing reforms implemented by the state which cast state responsibilities to sub-state regions (Falleti 2010).

The Santa Cruz autonomy movement sits somewhere in between these two forms of decentralization, both wielding the rhetoric of peoplehood and self-determination of indigenous territorial movements, while also pursuing free market capitalist goals of neoliberal decentralization. Eaton describes how a similar Regional autonomy movement like that in Santa Cruz also occurred in Ecuador in response to a progressive state, proposing a new categorization

of “conservative autonomy movement” (Eaton 2011, 291). However the success on the regional and national scale of the autonomy movement puts it in a category of its own.

Using the tools of political ecology reveals how the actors behind the Autonomy movement were deeply concerned with control over space, nature, and resources, and how they were able to effectively achieve these goals.. In this chapter I reveal how Santa Cruz elites were able to maintain their spatial configuration of monocultures in the face of the redistributive state, and effectively moderate the environmental and social visions of Morales and the MAS. While I look at the framing and tactics of the movement, I consider more deeply what these frames hid in the context of environmental change, economic practices and social conditions. My central questions are the following; how were Santa Cruz elites able to create regional consensus over the project of autonomy in a relatively short period of time- and how were these elites able to maintain their preferred socionature of monocultures. I conclude that the profound success of this movement was rooted in the region’s status as the nation’s food producer, emphasizing the essential role which agriculture plays in influencing the direction of state development and socionatural governance.

Rise of the Autonomy Movement

The autonomy movement began slightly before Morales' election, in response to contentious counter-neoliberal protests in the highlands. Neoliberal president Sánchez de Losada was unable to quell the mass protests against neoliberal reforms which are now known as the “gas wars.” Following police repression which left dozens of protesters dead, de Losada resigned, and Santa Cruz elites feared the indigenous and peasant movements in the highlands would bleed over into the lowlands. In 2003, the CPSC made a statement that “it now doubted

whether Santa Cruz would stay within Bolivia.”(Eaton 2017, 152) A similarly neoliberal president Carlos Mesa took office in 2003, while not being a radical, was the first president in decades without direct ties to Santa Cruz’s elites, which made the CPSC fear that he may side with the indigenous mobilizations in the highlands. (Centellas 2016, 24)

More radical, rightist elites in lowlands had already begun the “Camba Nation” movement, which started in 2001. The “Camba Nation ” threatened secession from the Andean majority indigenous part of the country, claiming a “right to self-determination” for an implicitly white population. The Camba Nation presents itself “as progressive, modern, productive, in favor of globalization, in contrast to the collas of the western highlands, which are presented as conservative, backward, unproductive (if not parasites) and globalphobic ... ” affirming its regional economy and culture as proof of its nationhood (Soruco, Plata and Medieros 2008, 143). Arising in the academic segments of the Santa Cruz elite, the Camba Nation “Far from being a plural and critical debate of the subject” and the autonomy debate rapidly became “radical and closed in defense of autonomy.” In this case the intellectual class supported the interests of the elite class and represented this subjectivity.(Soruco, Plata and Medieros 2008, 149-150)

While mastering the language of sovereignty and cultural rights used in indigenous autonomy and territorial movements in Latin America’s ‘territorial turn’ (Bryan 2012) the Camba Nation movement sought to defend the capitalist system rather than gain refuge from it. While the autonomy movement cast itself as a moderate alternative to the secessionist, more radical Camba movement, the Camba countermovement was far from a fringe movement. Lowrey calls this movement “the contemporary autonomy movement...most immediately threatening the integrity of any nation-state in the Americas”(Lowrey 2006, 64).

The membership of the two movement organizations overlaps. Carlos Dabdoub, a founding member of the Camba nation, was also a member of the CPSC and a member of ' administration (Soruco, Plata and Medieros 2008, 145). Furthermore, some of the key ideas that were theorized by the Camba Nations were operationalized by the CPSC. These ideas include the autonomic referendum and the concept of the “Media Luna” (Made of the departments of Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando and Tarija) along with the anti-colla discourse (Soruco, Plata and Medieros 2008, 145).



Figure 3.1: Autonomy Protest in Downtown Santa Cruz beneath the statue of Christ

A central theme of this discourse was a claim that the centralist state had long inhibited the development of Santa Cruz, ignoring the central developmental role the state played in constitution the agro-industrial bourgeoisie in Santa Cruz (Soruco, Plata and Medieros 2008, 84).

Drawing from this growing autonomist sentiment, In June 2004 the CPSC held a public rally for ‘autonomy and work’ at the foot of a large statue of Christ in downtown Santa Cruz (Fig. 1). 50,000 people attended the rally, which included a speech from CPSC president (and later, governor) Rubén Costas which discussed autonomy (Centellas 2016, 247). The president before Morales did not approve the autonomy referendum, thus the CPSC organized protests to legitimize their formation of a Pre-Autonomic Council, which began in 2004 (Centellas 2016, 249). The second cabildo, which drew 350,000 people, led President Mesa to issue a decree which would allow the department to elect a governor for the first time. Rubén Costas stepped down from his position as the president of the CPSC and won the December 2005 election- and was later re-elected in 2010 and 2015 (Centellas 2016, 249). This marked the beginning of the department as a meaningful level of governance, in the case of Santa Cruz, with considerable congruence with the private institutions and elites which had long dominated Santa Cruz society.

According to Political Opportunity theory, social movement strategies are influenced by how “open” or “closed” the political structures are to input. Movements in “open” systems largely work within the institutions of the state, whereas movements in “closed” systems use more confrontational strategies (McAdam et. al 1996, 44). When the MAS was elected in 2005 as the first majority government in decades, Santa Cruz elites feared that this would allow the MAS to pass many of their redistributive reforms (Fabricant and Postero 2013, 193-194). In this case, the relative closure of the state to the demands of the Santa Cruz elite seemingly influenced their decisions to mobilize in response. However, the alliances between Santa Cruz elites,

institutions, and the newly empowered regional government allowed elites to produce their own Political Opportunity structure, blocking out space for other, counter-autonomy movements to form. Morales started his presidency with harsh measures against the Santa Cruz institutionality which threatened his political project. In 2007, Morales imposed a 70% cut in hydrocarbon

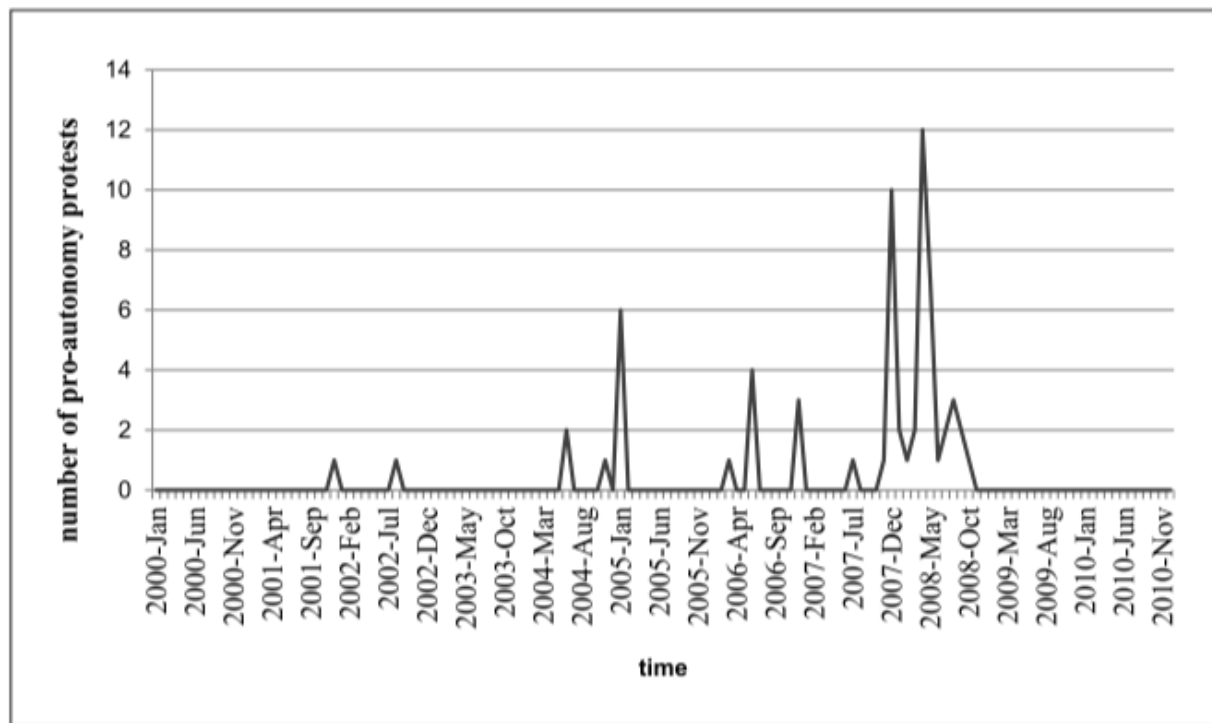


Figure 3.2. Pro-autonomy protests in Santa Cruz, 2000–2010. Source: Flesken, 2018;

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0263395717697343>

rent-sharing with producer departments, resulting in mass protests in Santa Cruz. Morales also threatened to nationalize three Santa Cruz cooperatives to lower the prices of public services and drove 30 Santa Cruz business or civic leaders for financing a plot to overthrow Morales. Leaders of the autonomy movement saw these arrests as proof of political persecution. (Eaton 2017, 158)

From 2006 to 2009, the autonomy movement closely corresponded to the status of Morales draft constitution (Figure 1). When Morales denied inputs from Santa Cruz in a 2007

draft of the constitution, massive and violent protests broke out in the city of Santa Cruz, resulting in negotiations and concessions. The government agreed to departmental legislatures which would give departments greater power to make laws. Second, Morales agreed to readopt bicameralism, leaving space in the Senate for opposition. (Eaton 2017, 160)

Protests included work stoppages, hunger strikes and demonstrations, all leading up to an illegal referendum on autonomy in 2008 which passed with 86% of the vote. (Eaton 2017, 157)

The Santa Cruz autonomy movement can be seen as a dual process between a popular social movement, and a hegemonic drive for power orchestrated by elite institutions and actors. While Santa Cruz elites could (and attempted to) seize power through violence- such as they did in a 2008 coup attempt (Eaton 165)- their most successful strategy used the popular movement for autonomy to legitimize their position while wielding their economic power and growing institutional power against the government.

Themes of democracy and human rights were common at autonomy protests. The large gatherings, which continue to take place in Santa Cruz, are called “gran cabildos”, meaning “large council” or a public deliberative assembly (Centellas 2016, 249). Human rights frames were acted out through embodied forms of protest such as hunger strikes, which took place in the colonial plaza in Santa Cruz in 2006 and 2008 in response to proposed reforms from Morales. One elite woman participating in a 2006 hunger strike, a member of the Comité Cívico Femenino, the women’s counterpart to the CPSC, stated; “We have taken this stance individually, in order to defend democracy, in order to defend citizen rights, in favor of justice and to live in peace” (Fabricant and Postero 2013, 188). In other protests, victimization was acted out through protestors lying in coffins draped with the Santa Cruz flag, and a Cruceña woman tied to a cross (Fabricant and Postero 2013, 194). Performances of subalternity, with

Cruceño protestors dressing as rural peasantry or indigenous people, have furthered a sense of collective identity and created a sense of legitimacy. Past sources of governmental legitimacy, such as the divine will of God or ability to provide material welfare, are at odds with the neoliberal conceptions of state, thus rhetoric about human rights and indigeneity have become essential to state-building, along with claims to resources and land. (Van Cott 2000, 6).

The social movement aspect is more visible and thus has been more extensively studied, however these processes are inextricably linked. The CPSC and Santa Cruz government, while initially lacking political power, expanded their influence over the region and the country through wielding their economic power and control over space. Yet their continued hegemony was fragile and depended on the popular, and visible, support of cruceños. Conversely, while regional sentiment was fomented by elites, it was received and interpreted by the population, who had diverse goals in their support (or lack of support) for autonomy. Centellas asserts ““an exclusive focus on the role of CPSC in the Santa Cruz autonomy movement refuses to recognize the agency of individuals or organizations not affiliated to (and perhaps even antagonistic to) the CPSC but who also participate in the broader demand for regional autonomy.” (Centellas 2015, 252)

The Autonomy movement has been conceptualized in several ways, ranging from a tactic for an elite backlash towards indigenous politics (Gustafson 2006), as a social movement (mass mobilization from below) or as a populist movement (mass mobilization from above) (Peña Claros 2006). Others argue that it must be studied as an ethnic or identity-based movement, emphasizing the way the “camba” identity has come to be deeply felt by many lowlanders. (Centellas 2015, 247 Other consider the movement as a fight over resource control (Weisbrot and Sandoval 2008) or a Conservative autonomy movement (Eaton 2008). Lowrey and others

assert that the more radical arm of the movement, the Camba Nation is a white separatist movement (Lowrey 2006).

Each of these lenses offers something to the study of this movement. I am studying the movement through the lens of political ecology because; 1. It allows a more plural understanding of the movement, neither as being completely orchestrated by institutions nor as a spontaneous revolt against centralism; 2 it highlights the important role which land and territorialization play in the movement; and 3. It refocuses study towards the material and socionatural consequences of autonomy, revealing that the autonomy movement continues to be a dominant force in Bolivia today.

Constructing territory

Vandergeest and Peluso define territory as the “abstract and homogeneous space” from which modern states derive and enact their power. (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995, 386) However territory and its control are not limited to the state. Rather, territoriality can describe any "attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area." (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995, 387-388)

As established in the previous chapter, elites in Santa Cruz have long maintained their power through establishing control over territory. While the departmental government of Santa Cruz held little power before the 2000s, elites predominantly in the city of Santa Cruz defended the socionatural relations of Santa Cruz through a series of state-like private institutions and prominent positions in the national government.

Territorialization, Vandergeest and Peluso assert ““is about excluding or including people within particular geographic boundaries, and about controlling what people do and their access to natural resources within those boundaries.”(Vandergeest and Peluso 1995, 388) The territorialization of Santa Cruz by the Bolivian state occurred partially through the National Revolution of 1952, however the weak capacity of the central government made space for Santa Cruz elites to enact their own forms of territorialization and maintain the unequal distribution of land which they profited from.

The territoriality of states is based on abstract space. Abstract space is space which can be divided into discrete units. Abstract space is “homogenous in that it is represented as uniform within any given territory” and is visualized through mapping. This allows the state and economy to visualize and enact power over space, which is imagined as discrete plots of private and state property. (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995, 388) However, “People do not experience space as abstract,” producing a conflict between these two spatial realms (Vandergeest and Peluso 1995, 389)

In a similar manner, Lefebvre identifies the “essential spatial contradiction of society” as the conflict between *abstract space*, which includes “the externalization of economic and political practices originating with the capitalist class and the state” and *social space*, or concrete space, which is the material space of “use values” which is interacted with by all classes (Miller 2000, 11). This tension is expressed through “the colonization of everyday life [through] the superimposition and hyperextension of abstract space” (Miller 2000, 13).

This “essential spatial contradiction” was a tension which Santa Cruz autonomy movement leaders had to overcome in their attempt to gain popular support. In the 1970s and 1980s, the CPSC attempted to foment a homogenous regional identity through the rehabilitation

of the term ‘camba’, which was previously used as a pejorative towards indigenous peasantry and began using it as a regional signifier. In doing so, they created their own regional *mestizaje*, a commonly used tool of nation-building. This ‘camba’ identity, seen as being of Spanish and lowland indigenous descent, was contrasted to the ‘colla’ identity, descended from Incas (Flesken 2018 54).

The assertion of a cultural identity to produce claim to territory reflects tactics of indigenous movements which arose in the 1990s (Bryan 2016). Lowrey sums this up well:

“Across the short space of a decade (the 1990s), the rhetoric of rights grounded in origins and essences has slipped out of history and into geography. On this new terrain it is wielded at least as well by Bolivian whites as by Bolivian Indians.” (Lowrey 2006, 65)

Much like the process of state-building, territory-building is facilitated through the development of a mythologized past, present, and future which produces a notion of a “people” with unique claims to a designated land and the resources within it. In order to produce a claim towards space, territorial movements emphasize relationships between people and land, often relying on a mythologized heartland and peasant. These mythologized “traditional” socionatures, which have often been disrupted by global capitalism, are central in constructing a vision of a territorial future based upon an idealized past. Alonso asserts that the modern state system, along with capitalist organization, have depended on the “homogenizing, rationalizing and partitioning of space,” (Alonso 1994, 382) along with the production of “homogenous, empty time,” which allow the state to depict itself as a cohesive community moving through history (Alonso 1994, 387-388) The CPSC, Departmental government and Cruceño media have worked in conjunction

with one another to proliferate a sort of nationalism which arose with the Camba Nation movement but was adapted into the more “moderate” drive for autonomy.

The Santa Cruz government website prominently features *Autonómica*, “autonomy” as one of its major sections. Subsections include “history,” “regional debate,” “Building Autonomy,” “departmental dialogue,” “democratic values,” and “Cruceño ideology.” The history section tells a story of the cruceño people fighting against the centralism of upper Peru and later the state of Bolivia for 450 years (Santa Cruz.gob.bo; accessed 2021).

The section “Ideología Cruceña” (Cruceño Ideology) asserts that the autonomist project is rooted in the culture and geography of the lowlands. It asserts that the Cruceño identity “is vividly felt, not by an enthusiastic minority” who desire to “preserve their individuality and ensure their permanence and development” in the face of the centralist state. This ideology argues that Bolivia as a “centralist, arbitrary and inefficient state that governed such a heterogeneous country” and that centralism is not a work of chance but “an endemic evil deeply entrenched in the brain of the Bolivian politician” (“Ideología Cruceña”, Santacruz.gob.bo; accessed 2021) The section outlines the territorial identity of Cruceños, the “people of the plains,” as rooted in the geography and history of Santa Cruz;

“The roots of this revolution for 'change' are centuries old. It begins with the native cultures of these vast plains that always walked in search of free territories, where they did not exist. ‘evil’,

creating an indomitable spirit ready to face adversity and seize the few opportunities in peacetime. The Spaniards who came to these lands came from a long war of seven centuries; They also dreamed of a generous land to reproduce their culture and way of life, to generate wealth and to be administered by their own autonomous government. Both worldviews, over

time, merged into one, emerging a mentality of women and men who fight for peace, fraternity and freedom.” (“Ideología Cruceña”, Santacruz.gob.bo; accessed 2021)

This excerpt places the present conflict in a mythologized history of Santa Cruz, emphasizing the Spanish and indigenous influences on the regional culture. This rhetoric evokes the cruceño as a frontiersman oppressed by the governing of a distant state, drawing attention to both the “generous lands” and the cultures of freedom which formed the regional identity. Alonso asserts the link between “people, heritage, territory, and state” is facilitated through natural metaphors and imagery, some of which depict the nation as a “grand genealogical tree, rooted in the soil that nourishes it.” These metaphors evoke limited membership, sovereignty, and temporal continuity (Alonso 1994, 383-84). An excerpt of Camba Nation founder Dabdoub’s book on the website asserts “This is how the seed of autonomy germinated and today it is a leafy tree that provides shade and shelter to all the peoples that occupy almost two-thirds of the national territory.” (Dabdoub, “The Pajutú Revolution” [Santa Cruz.gob.bo](http://SantaCruz.gob.bo) accessed 2021) The sense of racial and geographic superiority of regional elites can even be seen in its white-and-green flag. In Santa Cruz schools, it is taught that green symbolizes the natural riches of the region, while the white celebrates purity of lineage and nobility. (Gustafson 2006, 356)

Building Santa Cruz’s Monoculture of the Mind

While racist and elitist rhetoric remained prevalent in the autonomy movement, building popular support required reaching beyond the CPSC’s existing base of support. The “essential spatial contradiction” loomed large in Santa Cruz, with its deeply unequal distribution of land and wealth, landless peasant movements, and rapidly increasing migrant population. Eaton

identifies 3 non-elite sectors which it was crucial for the CPSC to win over: “Workers, indigenous groups and migrants” (Eaton 2017,154).

Movement leaders attempted to produce a homogenous regional identity using populist tactics. Laclau considers populism a tactic used by a dominated group to form coalitions with subaltern groups on class-neutral terrain. He asserts that this typically occurs through constructing a common identity- a shared understanding of “the people,” which is formed in opposition to the “constitutive outside” of the dominant group. The different struggles of the dominated groups are combined through a “chain of equivalences” which identifies a singular group, the dominant group, as the cause of all problems (Laclau 2005, 73-87).

The autonomy movement used a “chain of equivalences” to declare that centralism was the source of all problems and autonomy the solution. Populism derives power in the vagueness of its claims, and the autonomy movement used this to its advantage. Divergent understandings of what autonomy would mean motivated individuals to support autonomy for diverse reasons. However, for Santa Cruz’s business unions, aligned with the CPSC, autonomy constituted a radical form of decentralization which included regional control of natural resources (e.g. land, gas and timber), the right to maintain control over 2/3rds of tax revenues generated in the department, and the authority to control all policies within the department other than foreign affairs. This vision of autonomy far exceeded any of the forms of decentralization which had occurred in Latin America, drastically raising the stakes of the conflict (Eaton 2007, 73-74). The near total control of the department which Santa Cruz elites sought, Eaton notes, would also likely be negative for non-elite actors who were more likely to receive redistributive reforms from the progressive central government (Eaton 2007, 74). Thus autonomy was presented as a vague goal and rarely was described in detail at protests. Kirshner notes from his study of

migrants in Santa Cruz that few people seemed to understand what autonomy will actually mean on the ground, and how or if it will affect the material conditions of the poor. He asserts; “By strategically presenting autonomy as a catchall, movement leaders seek to build support beyond the landholding elites” (Kirshner 2010, 111).

However, the CPSC knew that building a broad coalition required more than rhetoric. It also reached out the marginal groups in more concrete ways. In order to win over workers, the CPSC took advantage of divisions within the State-affiliated Departmental Labor Federation (COD) and supported forcible power grabs by the right-wing interests within the federation. While some labor leaders sided with the MAS, others argued that the Central government’s labor federation (COD) was more concerned with public sector work, which had little benefit for cruceños, most of which are employed in the private sector. (Eaton 2017, 154) It also made “work” central to the drive for autonomy (despite the fact that many elites earn their wealth off of speculative landholding and the labor of others). Many of the early rallies declared themselves as being for “autonomy and work.” Carlos Daboub, a member of the CPSC and later Costas’ administration, asserted the autonomy movement is an expression of the Cruceño people’s desire to “live in peace and democracy, with autonomy and work” (Daboub Arrien, “The Pajutú Revolution”; accessed 2021).

Winning over the lowland indigenous population also posed a challenge for the CPSC. The CPSC had long promoted the myth of *feliz mestizaje* (happy miscegenation) in the lowlands, promoting the view that lowland indigenous people have pushed back against statist regimes of the highlands since the Incas ruled. However, many lowland indigenous groups saw through the multicultural facade and distrusted the right-wing, business aligned interest of the CPSC (Eaton 2017, 154). The CPSC attempted to incorporate indigenous people into their project by

promising food and other benefits to members of indigenous communities who agreed to travel to the City of Santa Cruz to participate in the CPSC's Special Assembly for indigenous people. However, this was seen as bribery and was criticized by some indigenous groups. Furthermore, many lowland indigenous leaders criticized the CPSC for fighting for departmental autonomy while rejecting claims of autonomy by indigenous groups. (Eaton 2017, 154)

In 2004, Bonifacio Barrientos, a Guaraní leader, was named "Representative of the Indigenous Peoples of the Department to the CPSC" leading to a division within the Guaraní community between pro-CPSC and anti-CPSC stances. However, Barrientos and other Indigenous leaders, attracted by political perks from the CPSC, precipitated a shift in allegiances of many lowland indigenous people. One Mojeño indigenous leader asserted this was not a result of trickery but a strategic allegiance; "I don't buy the 'happy miscegenation' argument—the conquest was as brutal here as it was in the highlands. But, unlike the indigenous groups in the MAS, I don't just want to 'live well' [*vivir bien*]. We want improvements and progress and a share of the profits that are generated by agriculture in this department." (Eaton 2017, 155)

Reflecting the incorporation of some lowland indigenous groups into the autonomy project, in 2007 CPSC leaders introduced articles to their draft autonomy statute that were demanded by indigenous leaders. (Eaton 2017, 155)

The CPSC also reached out to migrants, many of which come from the highlands and were not naturally allied with the autonomist cause. By 2010, 25% of the department and 38% of the city's population were born outside of the department (Kirshner 2010, 109), making this an essential demographic to win over. The Committee made a conscious effort to create a more inclusive definition of *Cruceñismo*, defining Cruceños as those *living in Santa Cruz* rather than *born in Santa Cruz*. (Eaton 2017, 156) Flesken asserts that "In this way, the autonomy movement

changed the definition of the cruceño from one of territorial, or even biological roots, to one of choice and thus de-ethnicized the category, broadening the boundary and making it more permeable” (Flesken 2018 56).

The CPSC staged cabildos in low-income areas of the city, including the barrio Plan Tres Mil where highland migrants are concentrated. Taking a play from the MAS’s playbook, the CPSC publicly promised more resources including health care, education and roads, to be supported by increasing natural-gas revenues. (Kirshner 2010, 108-109) The CPSC, while promoting spatial boundaries between groups in some ways, also helped marginalized groups overcome these boundaries to show popular support for their movement. A neighborhood-association leader in the Plan Tres Mil reported that the CPSC funded buses and arranged for migrants from her neighborhood to come to the January 2005 protest against the reduction in government subsidies for diesel. The diesel issue was put front and center to unite agro-industry interests and the interests of the lower classes, whose transport costs were rising. However, at the rally, this leader stated “It was no longer about diesel, and only about the demand for autonomy, the referendum vote. This wasn’t what we wanted, and they hadn’t consulted with us” (Kirshner 2010, 116-117)

The movement built on an already strong departmental cultural identity among indigenous and non-indigenous cruceños alike. A study shows that the average level “feeling Cruceño” rose from an already high 5.6 on a 7-point scale in 2006 to 6.19 in 2008 [Figure 2] (Flesken 2018, 59-60). Male and poorer inhabitants were more likely to identify with the department than female and richer inhabitants. However, cruceño identity was remarkably distributed across race, at least in this study. During this period, lowland indigenous people showed overall similar or even slightly higher identification with cruceño identity than the

department's population as a whole (Flesken 2018, 60-61). While it is unclear if this small survey is representative of the population as a whole, it still demonstrates a remarkable level of regional consensus.

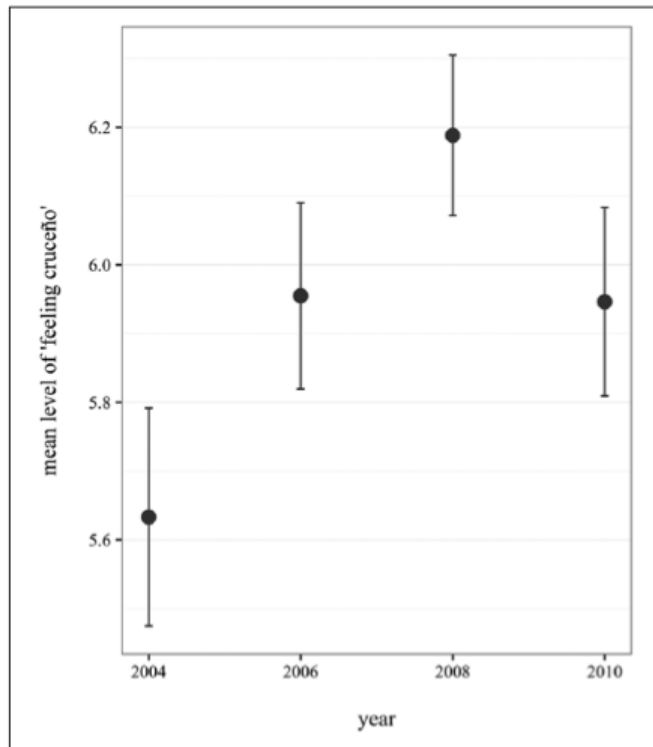


Figure 3.3. Identification with regional identity in Santa Cruz, 2004–2010. Answers to a survey question ‘To what extent do you feel cruceño?’ measured on a 7-point scale. Source: Flesken, 2018; <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263395717697343>

The seeming paradox of poor and indigenous people’s identification with the cruceño identity (though not necessarily the autonomy movement) can partly be explained by socio-spatial positionality. Leitner et. al asserts that while physical location can impact individuals’ abilities to access the resources necessary to participate in and contest social movements, an individual's sense of place is also deeply implicated in their decision to participate in collective action (Leitner et. al 2007, 164). Miller notes that in some instances, patterns of spatial

interaction are *more* important in developing a strong collective identity than abstract, “objective” social position (Miller 2000, 34).

Part of the reason socio-spatial positionality can explain the support for autonomy is the CPSC’s visibility in public space. The CPSC and allied elites’ domination of cultural activities in Santa Cruz meant that these frames were diffused at non-autonomy events as well, including business expos, street carnivals, and other regional cultural events (Gustafson 2006, 368).

The CPSC’s allied institutions provide a number of services including electricity and water to the city of Santa Cruz. Furthermore, private development institutions allied with the CPSC have undertaken many infrastructure projects in the city. The CPSC’s implication in these public goods has legitimized its presence as the “moral government of the cruceños” (Eaton 2017 146). Therefore, the CPSC is deeply woven into the concrete space of the city and the lived experience of its inhabitants, thus providing credibility for its frames.

Furthermore, Santa Cruz elites hold a “monopoly of public opinion,” and the elite-dominated cruceño media depicts a very narrow range of viewpoints. Much of the Bolivian Media has connections to Santa Cruz agribusiness- two major Bolivian media conglomerates (Red uno and Unitel) are controlled by the Monasterio ranching family (Eaton 2017, 165). TV and print news disseminate the elites’ “epic historiography” of regional identity which demonizes the “centralism” of the state and sensationalizes highland migrants as a “highland invasion.” (Soruco, Plata and Medieros 2008, 93) For example, a 2015 editorial in El Diario, the longest running newspaper in Bolivia, stated; “This is the fundamental struggle that the Bolivian people have: Autonomy vs. Totalitarianism...Only the consciousness of the people, expressed in popular pressure, will be able to wrest from the clutches of centralism the resources that the departments need to live well.” (Ortiz 2015) In a 2021 podcast, scholar Nicole Fabricant says the

Santa Cruz television media is “dare I say, worse than Fox News.” Much like Fox News, Televised news is widely watched by the Cruceño working classes, (“A New Beginning for Bolivia”, March 12, 2021) and has certainly contributed to the spread of autonomous sentiment.

The success of the Autonomy movement shows space-based identity and infrastructure projects can not only be a tool wielded by elites in order to obscure issues of class but can come to be deeply felt as a regional-national identity by the general population. Indeed, Former CPSC president and Governor Rubén Costas continued popularity and re-elections in 2005, 2010 and 2015 relied heavily on his focus on infrastructural improvements and support for agro-industrial elites. Drawing upon the ‘culture of capitalism’ elites had long fomented in the region, Costas criticized Morales’ program of offering small bonds to the poor, stating that his government would offer “seeds not bonds” (Eaton 2017, 159). His popular support not only “made it harder for detractors to dismiss the Santa Cruz model as merely an elitist manipulation,” but also demonstrates how many in Santa Cruz have come to view the capitalist successes of the region as a source of pride, whether or not they benefit from them. This was combined with a view by many that the benefits garnered from the department’s success as a whole would ‘trickle down’ and benefit marginalized groups more than the MAS would. One Mojeño indigenous leader asserted that support for the CPSC was not a result of trickery but a strategic allegiance; “I don’t just want to ‘live well’ [*vivir bien*]. We want improvements and progress and a share of the profits that are generated by agriculture in this department.” (Eaton 2017, 155)

The new cruceño identity was based around a capitalist cultural ideal and political orientation. Regional elites have long depicted the department as a “modernizing pioneer” (Gustafson 2006, 365) attributing Santa Cruz’s relative economic prosperity from its ability to develop a free market and historic lack of control from the central government. The movement

utilized “pull yourself up by the bootstraps” rhetoric, asserting that lowland people must come together to defend their right to private property and businesses in the face of the redistributive state (Fabricant and Postero 2013, 193). Economic rhetoric was closely linked to racialized rhetoric. The redistributive land reform proposed by Morales, which would redistribute unproductive land and thus threaten speculative land holding, was likened to the land invasions by the Bolivian MST and the “invasion” of highland migrants. Signs at numerous autonomy rallies declared; “The Land is Ours, Invaders Get Out!” (Gustafson 2007, 357).

While protests almost exclusively happened in the city of Santa Cruz, the culture of capitalism had long been disseminated in the countryside as a way to maintain the hegemonic social relations. Valdivia, in her study of agrarian elites, asserts that “selective memory” has been utilized by the Santa Cruz elite to promote the rare cases of that upward mobility as proof that agricultural elites have earned their station in life, valorizing hard work and demonizing poverty. (Valdivia 2010, 76-77) In this as “partial amnesia”, the long historical and institutional basis of inequality is overlooked in favor of instances of upward mobility, (Valdivia 2010, 77-78) while legitimizing existing inequalities of race and class as “natural” (Valdivia 2010, 68). One agricultural elite who was interviewed argued that people from the highlands know nothing about hard work; they “are used to herding llamas, not working seven days a week, under the hot sun, with all the diseases and mosquitos you have here.” (Valdivia 2010, 77)

The “selective memory” of upward mobility in a highly unequal society was not limited to elites, as demonstrated by the widespread support for the autonomy movement. As one highlander exclaimed in a Civic Committee meeting in 2010, “here in the land of the Oriente that I have awakened. We are living well, eating well, and we have work. Those who don’t are lazy.” (Fabricant and Postero 2016, 201)

Monocultures and “Multiculturalism”

Performance of regional identity and folklorized elements of lowlands indigenous culture became a central tactic of the autonomy movement. Cruceños increasingly identified as mestizos who shared heritage with indigenous people of Santa Cruz, including Guarani, Besiro and Guarayu, who Cruceños consider “our ethnics”. Additionally, many Cruceños began identifying as “*Cambas*,” once a derogatory term for indigenous peons, reclaimed as a regional identity (Gustafson 2006, 356). Lowrey asserts; “ This abrazo of Guaraní heritage is pre-eminently talismanic in that it wards off the accusations of racism that otherwise would become crippling in the post 1990s political milieu.”(Lowrey 2006, 72)

In the political atmosphere of Bolivia and Latin America as a whole, performing difference and indigeneity to bolster their claims of oppression. A statement on Santa Cruz department website asserts “No one can deny us the right to see, feel and understand ourselves differently in a diverse and heterogeneous world like the contemporary one”(“Ideología Cruceña”, Santacruz.gob.bo; accessed 2021).

Yet I argue that despite the claims of diversity and the use of indigenous symbols in public space, the CPSC has very much treated indigeneity in the neoliberal manner of multiculturalism rather than the plurinationalism espoused by Morales. According to Hale, using multiculturalism to uphold a capitalist system is not new. Rather, he argues that multiculturalism is part of the “cultural project” of neoliberalism and that in Latin America, the Mestizo ideology of state-building in the 20th century has been replaced with multiculturalism, which is more compatible with the democratization and individualism of neoliberalism

(Hale 2004, 17). The core of the neoliberal project is “the creation of subjects who govern themselves in accordance with the logic of global capitalism” thus a diversity of cultures is embraced only if they function within the bounds of these systems”(Hale 2004, 17). Therefore, he asserts “Far from eliminating racial inequity, as the rhetoric of multiculturalism seems to promise, these reforms reconstitute racial hierarchies in more entrenched forms.” (Hale 2004, 16)

Crabtree and Whitehead do not see Bolivia’s multiculturalism as having arisen from neoliberalism, but something which has persisted since colonial times. They assert: “From its origins, Bolivian multiculturalism was such that it sustained the blatant asymmetries of neocolonial society. This is its founding structure, the “original sin” that, in one way or another, continues to shape its historical destiny”(Crabtree and Whitehead 2008, 18)

During the autonomy movement, the incorporation of indigenous groups, migrants and workers into the project gave the movement a popular, multicultural face. The autonomy movement produced a new kind of “Indio Permitido.” The “indio permitido” (“Authorized Indian”) was coined by Bolivian sociologist Silvia Rivera, defining how governments use “cultural rights to divide and domesticate indigenous movements.”(Hale 2004, 17) Loyalty to the autonomy project seemingly offered the prospect of sharing in regional prosperity, or jobs in regional government. CPSC’s incorporation of lowland indigenous leaders exemplifies how “neoliberal elites gain the wisdom to respond to their indigenous critics not by suppressing dissent, but by offering them a job.”(Hale 2004, 19) On the other hand, Lowland indigenous organizations who attempt to assert any kind of sovereignty are depicted as “traitors to the region” who stand as a roadblock to regional goals (Gustafson 2006, 353).

Right Wing Violence in the Control over space

The essential emptiness of the Autonomy movement's "multicultural" face can be seen in the violence of movement actors. Indeed, the seeming regional consensus cannot be understood without also looking at the violent suppression of dissenting voices which movement leaders have benefited from and even encouraged. Individuals critical of the *CPSC* experienced "civic death," facing public harassment and being banned from cafés and restaurants (Eaton 2017, 156). The clearest illustration of elite-led violence comes with the UJC. The Unión Juvenil Cruceñista (UJC), the youth counterpart to the CPSC, has acted as the "strong arm" of the civic committee since its inception in the 1950s. In the contemporary autonomy movement, UJC members performed spectacles of violence along with acting out very real bodily violence against dissenters. In one 2006 rally, UJC youths beat a life-size doll of Morales with sticks and belts, calling him a dictator and a drug addict. They later burned the effigy while chanting "Autonomía, Autonomía, Autonomía!" The doll was set on fire as the UJC members chanted around it. (Fabricant 2009, 776) Group leaders later gave fiery speeches, asserting "it is our duty to defend Santa Cruz" and repeating the motto "Violence for the sake of reclamation and redemption" (Fabricant 2009, 778). Fabricant asserts: "Such carnivals of violence not only imposed order on the resistant indigenous body but also reinforced the elites' reign over the urban spaces of Santa Cruz" (Fabricant 2009, 778).

Fabricant notes that the ideological genealogy of the UJC traces directly back to the Nazis, originating from Nazis who fled to South America after world war 1. The founder of the UJC had close ties to former Nazi Klaus Barbie, the "Butcher of Lyon," who escaped to Bolivia in the post war period and worked as an interrogator under Santa Cruz-born dictator Hugo Banzer (Fabricant 2009, 778). UJC tactics included using both arms for training and literature

from Nazi youth brigades to inculcate members into the group, tactics that have survived to the present day (Fabricant 2009, 778).

Santa Cruz elites have cast extremist UJC youths as marginal actors, however in my view the UJC's role as the "strong arm" of the Santa Cruz elites has been essential in maintaining the sociospatial configuration of Santa Cruz. In September 2008, a Civic leader Rafael Paz called in the UJC to expel members of the MST (Landless Peasant Movement) from his land. The paramilitary youth engaged in tactics of torture and intimidation to extract information about the movement. One UJC member claimed the "MST is just a camouflaged arm of the larger MAS movement; they enter into other people's land [which is being worked] and they disrespect us.... They defy constitutional rights to property ownership and therefore must be pacified through violence"(Fabricant 2009, 779). This marked the beginning of a violent two months in 2008 which were a turning point for the autonomy movement.

Days after the attack on the MST, the UJC members attacked NGO lawyers, peasant and indigenous activists in the city, along with conducting a raid on the state land reform agency INRA as directed by the leader of the CPSC Branko Marinkovic(Eaton 2017, 156-157). Marinkovic was later implicated in the hiring of mercenaries to kill Morales and overthrow the MAS, but this coup attempt was intercepted by the Bolivian police (Eaton 2017, 154). When U.S. Ambassador to Bolivia was expelled from the country by Morales for supporting regionalist occupations, the eastern right flew into a frenzy. After years of escalating violence against indigenous and campesino dissenters in the lowlands, the most severe and horrifying act of violence took place on September 11, 2008. In Pando, right wing autonomists opened fire on indigenous peasants, killing 20 (Fabricant 2009, 780).

Ximena Soruco argues that the Pando Massacre was the last stand of a weakened right wing, desperate to maintain territorial control over regional space (Fabricant 2009, 780). Following the violence of 2008, the arrests of leading members of the Santa Cruz opposition made headlines, and the days of massive autonomy protests came to an end. However, it did not take long for Santa Cruz elites to change their tactics.

From Hunger Strikes to Food Shortages: Shifting Modes of Hegemony

Following the failure of violence and mass protest, in late 2008, Santa Cruz elites began to wield their power as producers of a large proportion of Bolivia's food in order to get their way. Eaton asserts: "While the arrest or exile of leading members of the Santa Cruz opposition made headlines, a deeper policy-based process of territorial reconciliation—initially subtle and hesitant but increasingly explicit and public— unfolded over the course of Morales's second term as president (2009-2014.) In effect, Santa Cruz compelled Morales to end the historic "*process de Cambio*" through which he promised to transform Bolivia, dramatically shifting his government in a liberal direction."(Eaton 2017, 163)

Agro-industry had long maintained their system through a number of institutions and unions, including Anapo (the Oilseed and Wheat grower's union), CAO (The Eastern Chamber of Agriculture) and CAINCO (the Chamber of industry and Commerce) and CADEX (Chamber of exporters). These institutions had coalesced under the CPSC and strengthened their ties amid the autonomy movement, while also gaining widespread popular support within the department.

Following the failure of coup attempt by Marinkovic, Santa Cruz elites implemented an "economic coup" leveraging their power as producers of food to pressure Morales to conform to

their vision. The 2008-2010 “food emergency” occurred when Morales promulgated legislation which implemented export quotas and stabilized food prices in order to deliver upon one of his main campaign promises of “food sovereignty.” (Eaton 2017, 164) Furthermore, Morales’s promotion of redistributive land reforms threatened eastern elites. The spike of land invasions in 2009 by landless peasants further concerned elites, who saw Morales as encouraging land invasions. Moreover, The FES (Social and Economic) requirement of land law which required landowners prove they are putting it to use, disturbed largescale landowners, who saw this as a lack of legal security of landownership and a limit to profitable land speculation.

In 2008, agricultural elites severely limited food production in order to pressure Morales, resulting in food shortages across Bolivia. This resulted in mass protest, and Morales eventually came to moderate his platform. Across the political spectrum there became a consensus that “so much of the country depends on Santa Cruz for food that Evo discovered he could not just do whatever he wants here.”(Eaton 2017, 166)

While similar regional separatist movements have happened in Peru and Ecuador over natural gas rents, they were not as successful in influencing the policies of the nation (Eaton 2017, 164). Furthermore, autonomist movements in the natural gas producing departments of the lowlands were not nearly as extreme or successful, despite natural gas being the Bolivian government’s most important source of revenue. I argue that this demonstrates the validity of Zavaleta Mercado’s assertion that ““A country is always what its agriculture is”(Mercado 1984, 22).

The MAS’s project of transformation was deeply shaped, and in this case limited by Bolivia’s socionature- that is, the political and the historical etched into the natural landscape of the country. Bolivia’s reliance on food produced in the lowlands originated with political and

economic transformations from 1952 revolution and the subsequent neoliberal agrarian reforms, which disrupted the traditional patterns of peasant agriculture in the highlands and promoted Santa Cruz as the “breadbasket of Bolivia.”

While public protests for autonomy dropped precipitously following the Pando Massacre (Figure 1), the autonomy movement elites drive for territorial control had just begun. Despite vice president Alvaro Garcia Linera’s claim in 2010 that the national government had defeated the autonomy movement “electorally, military and politically” (Eaton 2017, 163) the movement in fact succeeded in its spatial and socionatural goals, continuing to uphold social systems and modes of production “which destroy diversity and legitimize that destruction as progress, growth and improvement.”(Shiva 1993, 7).

CHAPTER 4. AUTONOMY'S LONG SHADOW: DESTRUCTION OF (BIO)DIVERSITY IN THE AGRO-STATE

On December 21st, 2010, Evo Morales passed Law No. 071: The Law of the Rights of Mother Earth. This law guaranteed the rights of Mother Earth, banned marketization and livelihoods and the natural processes that support them, and established the Plurinational Authority on Mother Earth, an authority to oversee the implementation of the MAS's environmental agenda (Müller, Pacheco and Montero 2014, 30).

Less than a decade later, in August 2019, wildfires burned across the Amazon. Santa Cruz was by far the region with the highest incidence of forest fires, and many pointed fingers towards slash-and-burn land clearances for cattle and soy. The previous month, Evo Morales had met with businessmen in the eastern departments to celebrate the promulgation of Supreme Decree 3973, which permitted the clearing of forests and 'controlled burning' of the forest for agricultural production. Many have pointed to this decree as the cause of the fires. (*Página Siete*, 27 Aug. 2019)

These two moments mark the tail ends of a decade in which was defined by immense change in the MAS and Bolivia as a whole, specifically due to Evo Morales and the MAS's shift towards a neoliberal model of development with an emphasis on agriculture. Soy came to be Bolivia's third largest source of foreign exchange after gas and mining, makes 3% of the GDP and 10% of total exports. The boom in soy produced new alliances between the MAS and regional and transnational economic elites through the production of a number of policies which benefit agrarian elites and promote consolidated production. According to Fabricant and Gustafson, "MAS has largely made its peace with soy" since 2012, when the MAS has made

“backroom deals” with Santa Cruz agrarian elites that “virtually nullify” radical land reforms which might limit large-scale landowners. (Fabricant and Gustafson 2016, 274) Furthermore, Morales announced in 2012 ambitious plans to increase the area of land under production from 2.7 million hectares in 2015 to 4.5 million hectares by 2020.(Fabricant and Gustafson 2016, 274-275) Despite the values outlined in the Law of Mother Earth, which prevents commercialization and commodification of the earth, as the decade progressed reforms and laws increasingly sided with the lowland agro-industrial elite and their export-oriented system of monocultures. Morales and the MAS received criticism from the national and international left for their embrace of capitalist agriculture and their failure to prevent the environmental destruction associated. Deforestation steadily accelerated throughout the 2010s, particularly in Santa Cruz and neighboring lowland departments (Fig. 1).

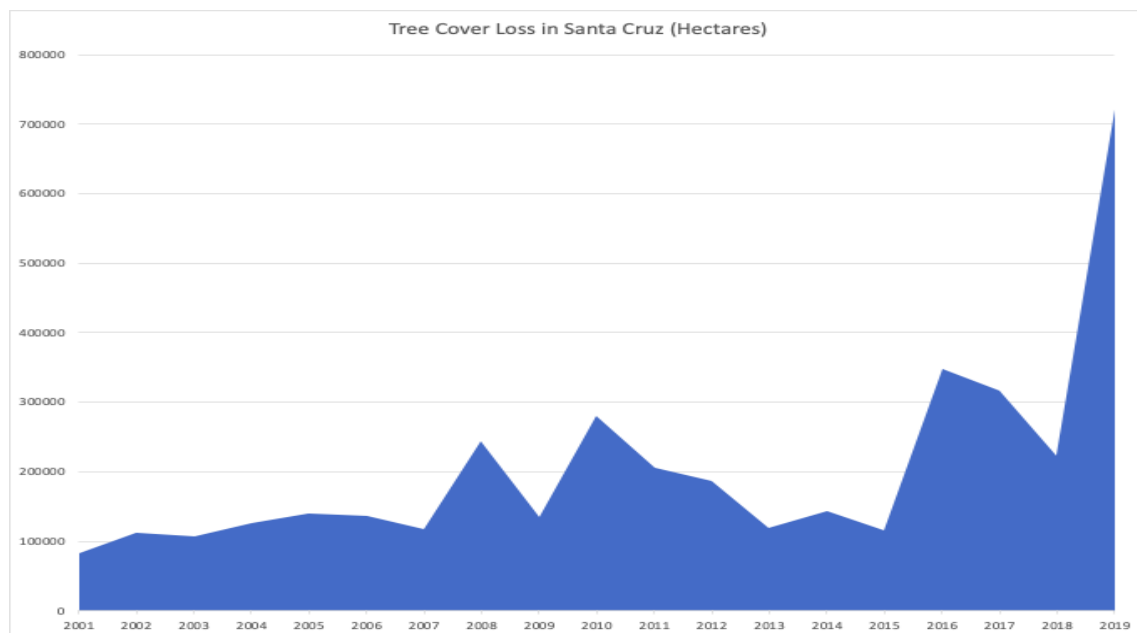


Figure 4.1. Annual Tree Cover Loss in Santa Cruz (Hectares) from 2001-2019. Spike in 2019 represents Amazon Fires. Data from Global Forest Watch (<https://www.globalforestwatch.org/dashboards/country/BOL/8>) (Accessed March 15, 2021)

Of the scholarly attention that the Santa Cruz autonomy movement has received, the vast majority has focused on the mass protests of the 2000s. Less understood is how deeply the alliance of eastern elites, international agro-industrial interests, and the popular movement which legitimated them have played in the course of Morales, and Bolivia's, history.

The US left media and a great deal of American scholars have criticized Morales's shift towards neoliberalism and environmental degradation as proof that his socialist and indigenous rhetoric were merely rhetoric, or at very least that his values were corrupted by his hunger for power. In 2014, following Morales' third re-election, the New York Times called Morales one of the "new Caudillos" whose presidency was weakening democracy in the region (*New York Times*, 16 Oct. 2014).

US-based scholars Brabazon and Webber argue that Morales' government is a reconstituted form of neoliberalism, with an emphasis on social participation, diversification of economic relations, and social spending. They assert that Reconstituted neoliberalism in the Bolivian context is a "tactical attempt by the Bolivian ruling classes to adjust to the social contradictions generated by the implementation of neoliberalism in the country while preserving the class project underlying neoliberalism and the successes it has enjoyed." Brabazon and Webber see the Bolivian project as a form of "actually existing neoliberalism" which demonstrates the flexibility of neoliberalism and its ability to adapt to contexts which are hostile to it. (Brabazon and Webber 2014, 437)

While this critique and the many others like it have merit, I also hesitate in downplaying the genuinely radical direction of the MAS in its early years. From Morales election in October

2005 to August 2006, the MAS distributed 3.5 million hectares (9 million acres) to landless communities. Furthermore, the state itself set up its first MST-style settlement in 2006, Pueblos Unidos. This settlement allowed 628 landless communities practice their communal systems of agriculture upon 16 thousand hectares of land outside of Santa Cruz. Ezinna asserted in 2008 “Pueblos Unidos is a powerful sign of progress for Bolivia’s landless peasants, intently monitoring the progress of Morales’ reform.”(Ezinna 2008, 230)

So how did the MAS shift from openly supporting the MST to forming deep alliances with agroindustry? To understand this, I have looked to Bolivian scholars, who have taken a more nuanced approach to understanding the role which eastern elites and agroindustry have played in influencing the direction of Bolivia’s politics. I have also drawn from works by the TIERRA foundation, an organization dedicated studying agrarian change in Bolivia. A significant portion of my research, however, has focused on Bolivian newspapers, particularly *Página Siete*, the largest independent paper in Bolivia.

In this chapter, I argue that Santa Cruz elites and their allies were effectively able to steer the course of Bolivia away from Morales’s original *proceso de cambio* and towards their preferred model. Despite the initial claims of the autonomy movement, this model isn’t a free-market system in which Santa Cruz is completely autonomous. Rather, this system is constituted in *selective* autonomy, in which Santa Cruz elites are given the political and legal autonomy which allow them to uphold their systems of monocultures, while the state is still relied upon for its maintenance of legal private property and subsidies which support agriculture. Santa Cruz elites who once called for autonomy became increasingly allied with Morales’ government as a result of their dependence on the support of the state, particularly due to the climatic effects that hit Santa Cruz agro-industry harder each year.

From an analysis of news articles and scholarly research from the 2010s, I conclude Evo Morales and the MAS increasingly gave in to the demands of Santa Cruz due to several geopolitical causes; The fall in global oil prices; The threat of violence in Santa Cruz and the necessity of maintaining food security. However, these factors alone do not explain why Santa Cruz elites were able to reproduce their regional hegemony at the national scale. Deeply implicated in the mitigation of Morales' revolutionary agenda was the global monoculture of the food regime, a network of agribusiness and food elites, NGOs and governments who promote industrial agriculture and assert that it is the best and most productive way of producing. I argue that the events of the 2010s in Bolivia emphatically prove that this model has deleterious effects on the environment and the social fabric of Bolivia, putting not only nature but alternative forms of knowledge at risk. I maintain that these dual processes of monoculture production that occurred in Santa Cruz in the 2000s were neither economically nor socially enriching, but rather in both cases "Monocultures spread not because they produce more, but because they control more" (Shiva 1993, 7)

Renee Zavaleta Mercado asserts that multiple iterations of the state could exist on top of a singular mode of agricultural production, and thus a singular set of socionatural relationships, which are in fact what determine society. In his view, the state merely constitutes "juridical forms of circulation superimposed upon local practices of the transformation of nature", thus the state itself can "never be more than a weakly supported facade." (Zavaleta Mercado 1986, 229) From this perspective I analyze how the revolutionary horizons of the MAS have been severely limited by the networks of international actors, capital, and regional elites which uphold inequalities dating back to the colonial era. From this, I argue that the MAS's declared goals of

indigenous liberation, racial equality, and Vivir bien of people and the environment cannot truly be achieved while industrial agriculture is embedded within their vision of development.

Rise of the MAS Agro-state

MAS's reluctance to carry out the land reform of their 'Agrarian Revolution, Tilzey argues, was evident since 2010, when the MAS shifted its focus to land registration rather than expropriation and redistribution. This, Tilzey argues, left the landed oligarchy "unchallenged" (Tilzey 2019a, 636). Beyond leaving the land distribution of Santa Cruz unchallenged, the MAS also actively colluded with agro-industry. However, the MAS's view of lowlands agro-industry shifted from cautiously granting regional elites' regional control, to a much deeper alliance between agriculture and the state. The beginnings of this alliance came alongside the end of the food crisis (and, ironically the promulgation of the Law of Mother Earth). An analysis in *Página Siete* in 2013 asserted that the MAS regime had for the previous 2 years been developing "a close alliance with the Santa Cruz business community, with the CAO, in part with CAINCO, with the oilseed confederation. the relationship is intimate..." The article asserted that this alliance was borne out of the uncertainty of the food crisis along with the attempts of the MAS to stay in power; "The President has to bet more, give more for the attention of the people now than in 2006. Each sector seeks its own perk and for the next elections the perks will have to be greater" (Pagina Siete, 28 Sep. 2013).

Demonstrating this burgeoning alliance, proposals began circulating in late 2013 surrounding a Morales new development policy that he would carry out if re-elected in 2014, heavily centering the role of agroindustry. Proposals emerged which discussed the radical expansion of the agricultural frontier to 13 million hectares by 2025 in order to, as it was said,

contribute to the country's food security and sovereignty (Página Siete, 4 Oct. 2013). These proposals not only targeted the support of the agrarian elites but addressed the issue of food sovereignty that was on the mind of many Bolivians following the food crisis. However harmful effects of the expansion of the agricultural frontier were already becoming evident, contributing to the severe climatic phenomena that hit Santa Cruz throughout the 2010s (*Página Siete*, 13 Dec. 2013). Following severe droughts of 2013, Santa Cruz businessmen spoke to Morales and requested he remove the restriction on food exports so that they could make up for the losses caused by drought. In November of 2013, the Government approved a higher soy export quota through supreme decree despite the growth of soy faltering (*Página Siete*, 4 Nov. 2013). This pattern of climatic losses followed by agribusiness the government for help repeated over the next few years, with agribusiness making ground each time. Their argument nearly always proceeded in the same way, following the model which the autonomy movement hoped to achieve; free exports; provide subsidies for diesel and loans for climatic losses; permit genetically modified organisms; and enforce legal ownership of land.

A central consideration of the MAS's alliance with big agriculture were the falling prices of minerals and gas. By 2014, the commodity boom which began in approximately 2003 seemed to be coming to an end. Mineral prices fell by 20%, while hydrocarbons and soy fell 2.9% and 2.4% respectively. Bolivia's economic dependence on primary commodities posed an imminent threat to the MAS government, which relied on hydrocarbon rents in order to enact its social programs (Loza, 5 Apr. 2014). While Soy prices were nearly as volatile as hydrocarbons, agribusiness and its proponents used the end of the commodity boom as justification for the expansion of agroindustry.

In February of 2014, the burgeoning alliance between Morales and Santa Cruz resulted in a significant concession. Morales promulgated a modification to the Law 337 to Support Food Production and Forest Restitution. This law established that after one year, producers would be able to regularize ownership of land they illegally cleared on the condition that food is being produced. The announced goal was to increase food production “and thus restore forests.” The head of the Oilseed Growers Association ANAPO said this would allow large, medium and small producers who cleared land illegally to produce food (Mamani, 27 Feb. 2014). A month later, ExpoSoya, in Santa Cruz, Morales announced a supreme decree which allowed the exports of 300 thousand tons of surplus soybeans. The CAO president and a Santa Cruz government representative thanked Morales for his “determined participation in supporting production in the eastern part of the country” (*Página Siete*, 15 Mar. 2014).

That year, the cultivated area in Bolivia grew by an astounding 40%, most of which made up of soy (*Página Siete*, 23 Dec. 2014). However, at the same time, the worsening climatic conditions caused soybean exports to fall by 68.51% (*Página Siete*, 14 Feb. 2015).

The MAS’s War on Landless Peasants

While the successes of the Autonomy movement prevented major land expropriation from taking place in Santa Cruz, agribusiness elites argued throughout the 2010s that the government must provide further legal security for their land. Landless peasant invasions spiked in 2009 along economic turmoil and food shortages, and Santa Cruz agribusiness elites believed that Morales was responsible. These elites encouraged the liberal Bolivian Institute of Foreign Trade (IBCE) to visit “invaded farms” and create a press release in attempt to foment opposition to landless peasants (Eaton 2017, 160). In November 2013, the Bolivian Institute of Foreign

Trade (IBCE) carried out this visit, and reported that more than 70 agro-productive farms had been “overwhelmed” by landless peasants Santa Cruz. The president of ANAPO denounced the “bullies” for their “abuses” on the farms, adding that the “assaults” affected more than 50,000 hectares (*Página Siete*, 28 Dec. 2013). The MAS, despite initially radical rhetoric about land redistribution, agreed to support the expulsion of landless peasants. The Vice Minister of Rural Development and Lands, Víctor Hugo Vásquez, asked the judicial authorities identify those responsible for the assaults and punish them with the full weight of the law. "In this country there is no place to appropriate private property," said the authority (*Página Siete*, 16 Nov. 2013).

While the early years of the MAS had built its populist project with landless peasants in mind, directly referring to the MST as an example of the future which they were trying to build, the MAS agro-state increasingly identified landless peasants as enemies of agrarian development. Tilzey asserts that the post-2010 MAS increasingly promoted their populist project on the ideal of the small productive farmers, a class of upper peasantry which had grown in size under the redistributive policies of the MAS. At the same time, however, agroindustry had accelerated issues of semi-proletarianization and landlessness. Thus, the upper peasantry and small-scale capitalist farmers formed the new populist alliance of the MAS, considering that they followed logics which did not threaten the agrarian oligarchy (Tilzey 2019a, 637).

Likely with re-election in mind, Morales and the MAS cracked down on landless peasant invasions in the year leading up to the 2014 election. The Association of Agricultural Productive Farms (ASPPA), formed in 2012, worked in conjunction with the National Land Institute (INRA) to remove “land invaders” (Escóbar, 30 Sep. 2014). September 2014 in *Página Siete* announced that the number of “dominated” farms in the east had dropped from 120 to 50 in the

previous year (Escóbar, 30 Sep. 2014). Landowners made clear that legal certainty of land would determine whether they would contribute to the Government's objective of providing food security by 2025. (Escóbar, 30 Sep. 2014). Morales and Linera were likely acutely of the threat of food shortages should they dare turn a blind eye to land invasions.

The “Patriotic Agenda” and the Expansion of the Frontier

Morales was re-elected in October of 2014 into unwelcoming economic circumstances. An analyst said of his economic environment: “It cannot be said that the bonanza ended, but the brightest hour has passed. Prosperity falls slowly but falls.”.”(*Página Siete*, 18 Oct. 2014) Morales's re-election coincided with increased pressure from the soybean sector for government subsidies to support them through the losses incurred by climate change. Importantly, the MAS no longer held a majority in congress, and agro-industry representatives once again held prominent positions in the national government. “They are not MAS militants, they are representatives of their sectors, and they will assume their defense ” (*Página Siete*, 18 Oct. 2014) The next month, as predicted, a drop in oil prices was announced (*Página Siete*, 13 Nov. 2014).

The new MAS government promulgated the Patriotic Agenda 2025, which prominently featured agro-industrial development as a strategy for national development, echoing tenets of Santa Cruz's own development model. Most significantly, the Government challenged the agro-industrial sector to triple food production and expand the agricultural frontier by 13 million hectares in 10 years and triple food production under the justification of “Food Sovereignty”.

Despite framing the expansion of agro-industry as a defense of food sovereignty, researchers question the efficacy of this route. Researchers from the Tierra Foundation warned that agro-industrial production in fact posed a threat to food security as Santa Cruz agroindustrialists prefer to plant soy for export rather than food. The study found that from 2001 to 2013, transgenic soybeans increased by 622,000 hectares, while potato, a staple part of the Bolivian diet, grew only 2,000 hectares. Furthermore, many other staple foods have *decreased* since 2001, including tomatoes, garlic, broad beans, cassava, grain barley and even animal fodder, such as alfalfa and barley. As a result, Bolivian diets have shifted towards including more sugar, rice, chicken, oil, dairy and processed food (Página siete, Nov. 5 2014). A further study by the Tierra Foundation also challenged the idea that an expansion of soy production would contribute to national economic growth. The study revealed that the benefactors of this expansion will be transnationals, who control 90% of the collection and exportation of grain. Castañón asserted “the soy and Santa Cruz business in general is an oligopolistic system. There are five companies that they control more than 90% of the stockpiling and export of grain (*Página Siete*, 5 Nov. 2014).

Indeed, the period from 2003 to 2013 saw the greatest increases in imports of machinery and equipment, intensifying the use of capital in agriculture and reducing the salaried labor force per cultivated hectare. An editorialist in *Página Siete* asserted in 2014 “in the name of the country's food sovereignty [the Patriotic Agenda] intended to favor the accumulation of capital of the agricultural and agro-industrial bourgeoisie in a context of decline in the prices of others. export products such as minerals and hydrocarbons.”(Ramírez, 11 Dec. 2014).

The 2015 Agricultural Summit: The end of the Process of Change

By 2015, more than 43% of the Bolivian territory in the process of desertification due to poor land management, monocultures, and climate change. Producers combatted desertification through fertilizers, which were almost entirely imported and dominated by a few transnationals. That year, Bolivia ranked among the 6 countries with the highest deforestation rate (Fig. 2), which combined with its status as one of 10 mega-biodiverse countries spelled a severe threat to biodiversity (Saaravia, 30 Apr. 2015).

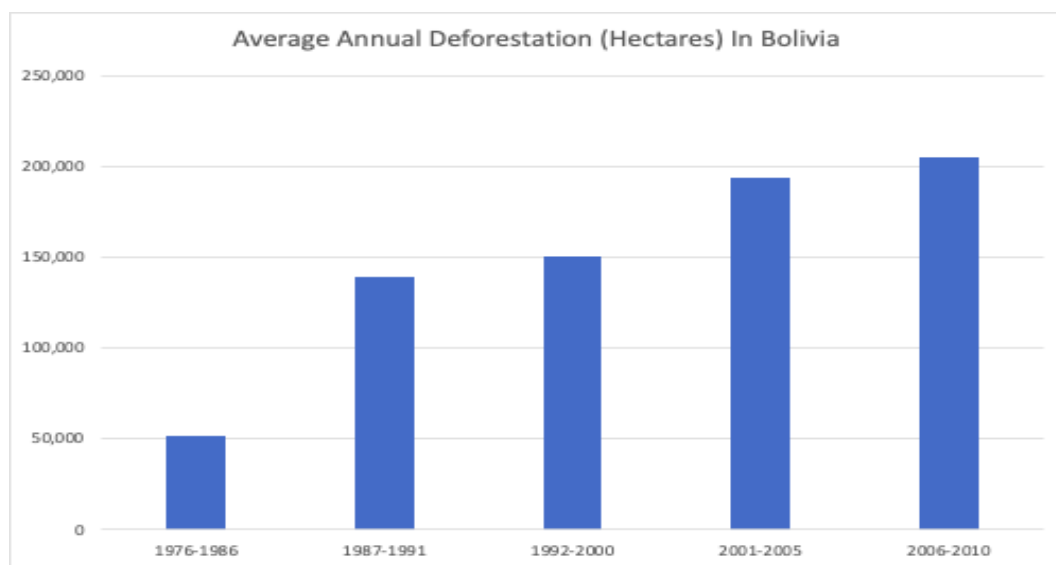


Figure 4.2: Average annual deforestation from 1976-2010 in Bolivia. Data from Müller, Pacheco and Montero 2014, p.9.

It was in this context that the Sembrado Agricultural Summit occurred in April of 2015, in which agribusiness met with the MAS government. producers and committees including ANAPO, CAINCO and CAO demanded the government change the Economic and Social Function of land law, which required land fulfill a social or economic purpose, was changed from being evaluated every 5 years to every 2. Producers argued that this created

insecurity of legal ownership that prevented investment. (*Página Siete*, 25 Apr. 2015) However, it certainly also spoke to their concerns over speculative landholding, a profitable business as the value of productive land increased fivefold between 2007 and 2013, largely due to state investments in irrigation and road access (*Página Siete*, 6 Dec. 2014). Producers also argued for laws which would facilitate the expansion of the agricultural frontier, and the permission to freely use GM seeds. Producers argued that these measures would help to “get rid of the ideology shown by the government in its early years, focused on restricting the activity of Bolivian entrepreneurs in that sector.” *Página Siete*, 25 Apr. 2015) The government agreed to all demand save for those involving GM seeds, and asserted that these changes would cause the private sector to make more investment in agriculture, which would lead to greater food production and economic output. (*Página Siete*, 23 Apr. 2015a) Producers celebrated the new administration for its “approach to development, which matches the vision of entrepreneurs.”(*Página Siete*, 25 Apr. 2015)

This meeting, and the subsequent reforms was of fundamental importance to the new direction of Bolivia under Morales third, and final, term. If Morales initial “process of change” had not yet ended, this little discussed meeting certainly can be seen as its unceremonious death. The event left many Bolivians questioning who agro-state alliance really served. As of 2015, Agriculture contributes to 0.01% of state income, 10 times less than mining. The industry is barely taxed, and by that time there was “no intention of the state to promote a similar policy toward the national agribusiness,” which continued to benefit from significant state subsidies on diesel. Furthermore, a significant part of the profits generated by the sector did not stay in the country. Previous studies based on data from the Santa Cruz Business union itself found that

70% of cultivated area of soybeans was in the hands of foreigners in 2007 (Castañón 5 Jun. 2015).

Miguel Urioste, head researcher at the Tierra Foundation, argued that Bolivia was experiencing an accelerated expansion of the agro-extractivist capitalist accumulation model. Urioste asserted that the Agro-state pact sought to “ensure that in the medium-term Bolivia is part of the largest league of soybean producers in the world.” However, these results, he argues, will be deleterious. He claims that Bolivia is following in the footsteps of Paraguay’s agrarian transition over the last decade, which resulted in one million displaced peasants and six million hectares of deforestation (Urioste, 31 Jul. 2015).

Morales’ shift towards embracing industrial agriculture can be only partially explained by his interest in promoting food sovereignty and his need to make up for the economic deficit left by the fall in oil prices. It also speaks to international pressures that extend far beyond the borders of Bolivia, rooted in an ideology of industrial monoculture production which is promoted by governments, agro-food corporations and NGOs. Bolivia’s shift towards monocultures of industrial soy reflects trends taking place across the South American continent. Mass production of soy which is largely destined to feed livestock in Brazilian and Chinese markets, has supplanted other forms of more sustainable agriculture and resulted in severe environmental effects. On September 23 and 24 2015, the III International Andean Amazonian Rural Development Forum was held, in which exhibitors from Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Argentina, Colombia, Paraguay and Peru met to discuss this issue. Paraguayan sociologist Quintín Riquelme shared that his country, which opted for the agro-industrial agricultural model in the 1950s, has seen massive displacement and, among other consequences, the reduction of food production. "There is less and less food. Where is the food produced? It is produced on peasant

farms. All the items that you know of peasant production: cassava, beans, corn ... Monoculture expels people. Before, more peasant families lived, today they live less because there is a very large area with mechanization. And those people come to the city, where they live in poor conditions and the condition of the city in general also worsens.” Those who stay near to agroindustry in Argentina are called "fumigated peoples", as they are subjected to the chemicals used in monoculture production. A representative asserted at the forum that, worryingly, this is a "phenomenon that is entering Bolivia” (*Página Siete*, 26 Sep. 2015).

However, in Bolivia, as had happened across the continent, the forces of free-trade liberalism and agroindustry which have upheld the food regime overpowered the voices which questioned industrial agriculture. A representative of the IBCE brushed off the concerns raised by the conference; “What is the use of a country having an extensive territory, productive possibilities and natural resources and that all this remains unexploited... What is the use of longing for idyllic scenarios of peasants producing only for themselves and without connecting to the market....Bolivia must become a great producer and exporter of food, hopefully with added value, because only through this will food sovereignty will be achieved.” When asked what agricultural model should be followed in order to prevent harmful effects, the IBCE representative responded, “The model is in Santa Cruz, where there is a scale production system with technology, but also respectful of the environment, sustainable over time and socially responsible and inclusive.” (*Página Siete*, 26 Sep. 2015)

Critics of Morales noted the irony of the government’s newfound affinity to Santa Cruz’s elites and their ideologies. Vice President García Linera’s 2010 statement about the defeat of the autonomy movement was parodied by Andrés Soliz Rada, a former Minister of hydrocarbons.

“The MAS, after defeating the Santa Cruz oligarchy, politically and militarily, allows it to reproduce its economic model and now earn more money than ever” (Rada, 27 Jul. 2016).

Multinationals in Santa Cruz

Agro-food multinationals which are based in the global north have come to see Bolivia not as a supplier of food- almost all exports go to the protected Andean market- but as a *consumer* of agro-chemicals and genetically modified seeds. To this end, Morales and the MAS were roadblocks, as they made GMOs other than one kind of GM soy illegal. Still, Multinationals including Monsanto and Bayer had promulgated ties with Santa Cruz agro-industry since the 1990s. Agro -food corporations such as Bayer display their products at EXPOSOYA and EXPOCRUZ, large industry events held in the city of Santa Cruz each October. (*Página Siete*, 22 Oct. 2015 , 16 Mar. 2018).

Despite agro-industry’s claim that GM crops are superior, Glyphosate herbicide tolerant soy, the only authorized GM crop in Bolivia since 2005 has not improved production. In the 5 years prior GM authorization Soy production yielded 1.98 tons per hectare, while in the 5 years after authorization when 92% of the soy produced was GM, yields averaged 1.80 tons per hectare. While producers have cited an increase in soybean production in tons per year during this period, this was due to the expansion of cultivated hectares.(Vargas, 14 Aug. 2016). At the same time, the chemical inputs required for monoculture production, which are sold by multinationals, increased drastically. From 1999 to 2015, the use of agrochemicals tripled for each cultivated hectare (*Página Siete*, 17 Oct. 2017). An editorial in El Diario, articulating a rare critique of agroindustry from the Santa Cruz based paper, stated “our agriculture in which

transgenic soy represents almost 36% of the cultivated area in the country is in a disaster phase.... There is a total dependence on seed and agrochemical corporations that has led to the total loss of scientific sovereignty.... and [Bolivia] has come to be totally dependent on patented seeds and agrochemicals, many of which are internationally prohibited due to their high degree of toxicity”(El Diario, 23 Sep. 2018).

While the promoters of GM crops speak of "democratization of technology", in reality they seek the opening of markets for GM seeds and pesticides, and the high input costs and focus on monocultures exclude the majority of peasants.(Vargas, 14 Aug. 2016) From 1999 to 2015, the use of agrochemicals tripled for each cultivated hectare in Bolivia. (*Página Siete*, 17 Oct. 2017) A study by Bascopé and Bickel asserts that of the 229 pesticides in Bolivia, 164 (72%) are considered toxic and 78 and highly dangerous. 75 of these are not authorized in the European Union. According to the PAN (Pesticide Action Network)’s list of highly hazardous pesticides, some these pesticides have been linked to cancer and numerous other health effects. Pesticide runoff has been known to destroy local biodiversity, leading to pest resistance, ecosystem instability, soil degradation, the extent to which these consequences are visible in Bolivia is currently unknown, however the proliferation of widespread pest damage and crop diseases in the 2000s suggests that these chemicals are already taking their toll (Bascopé and Bickel 2018).

Furthermore, the growth of soy has resulted in displacement of small-scale agriculture. Despite the overall reduction of poverty in the country under Morales, this trend has not affected the city and countryside equally. While 31.2% of the urban population was impoverished in 2015, in rural areas 71.5% still live-in poverty, with this poverty concentrated in the highlands and valleys with their higher population density and high number of indigenous people. (15-16) In the highlands, 79.4% of the rural population is poor, while in the lowlands, 62.1% is poor.

(22) Although, among lowland indigenous people, poverty rates are as high as 79% (Colque, Urioste and Eyzaguiere 2015, 24). As a Result, Bolivian food imports have increased precipitously alongside growth of soy, which was spurred by the commodity boom of the early 2000s and the legalization of GM soy in 2005. (Colque, Urioste and Eyzaguiere 2015, 15) (Fig. 3) Urioste asserts that expansion of the soy frontier has occurred across South America, in response to “unstoppable demand” of the Republic of China for soy. The southern cone, led by Brazil and Argentina, together has displaced the US as the main soybean producer in the world.

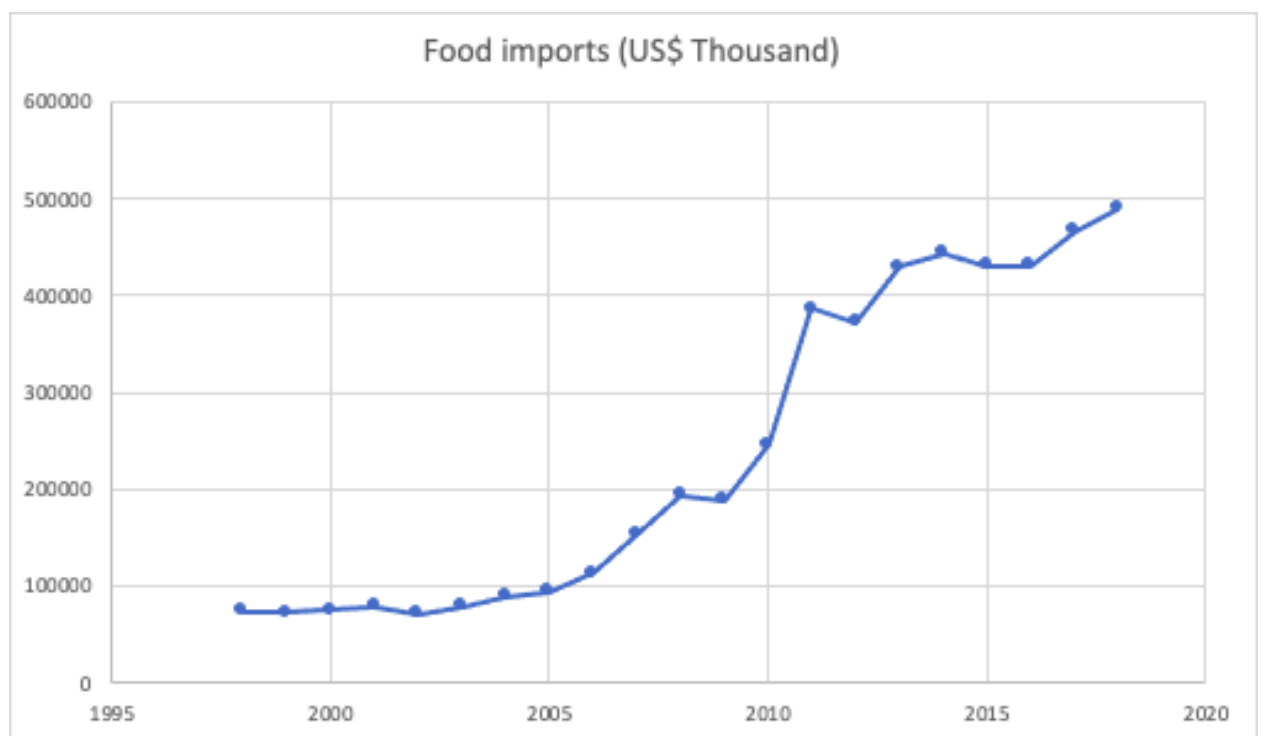


Figure 4.3: Food Imports, 1998-2018 (Data retrieved World Integrated Trade Solutions;

<https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/Country/BOL>

Despite the failure of industrial agriculture to provide food sovereignty, Santa Cruz agroindustry frequently returned to the line that they are “the ones who guarantee the country's food security

and sovereignty,” and thus their demands must be met. (Mamani, 4 Aug. 2016) However, as Miguel Ángel Crespo, the director of Probioma asserts: "Bolivia is now importing 150 foods that it used to produce. It seems to us a fallacy to say that the agricultural frontier is going to be expanded to feed the country. That is not going to happen, because producers are looking for profitability, crops oriented to export. With the expansion of the agricultural frontier we are going to exacerbate the problem of climate change, we are seeing that now there are longer droughts and more torrential rains ". (*Página Siete*, 17 Oct. 2017)

Indeed, in 2017, Soybean production dropped by more than 50% due to droughts in the first half of the year and intense rains later in the year. (*Página Siete*, 8 Jan. 2017). In December of that year, under intense pressure from the agricultural sector, Evo Morales announced the free export of meat, sorghum, soybeans, sugar and their derivatives. (*Página Siete*, 19 Dec. 2017).

Several days later, the department of Santa Cruz achieved autonomy *Página Siete*, 31 Dec. 2017).

Autonomy at last

Costas celebrated the statute, saying “It is a statute that does not depart from the Political Constitution of the State, that allows to dream, invites the inclusion of that Santa Cruz of today and of the future.” Costas asserted that the autonomy statute is inclusive and was prepared with all of the inhabitants of the department of Santa Cruz in mind. He also emphasized that the autonomy statute was the “mandate of the people”, as was expressed in the autonomy protests. The president of the Departmental Assembly, Marco Mejía, declared the autonomy statute; it is the achievement of the Santa Cruz people, it is the materialization of their struggles and their dreams that is why we must recognize all those who mobilized," he said. (*Página Siete*, 31 Dec. 2017)

On January 30th, 2018, The Autonomy statute was implemented. The government of Santa Cruz emphasized that the statute was a “modern proposal that benefits all the citizens of Bolivia” yet argued that this process was not done. The Secretary of Government of the department stated, "With the promulgation of the autonomous statute a cycle of this feat is closed, and new challenges will surely come, among which are to achieve the Fiscal Pact and fight for more powers.” Along with the near-total territorial control granted by the autonomy statute, Santa Cruz agroindustry demanded total freedom of exports, which included a departmental land institute and a regional police force.

It seems that with this autonomy statute, Santa Cruz elites will be able to carry out their vision of development, whether or not that benefits most Bolivians or even many individuals in their department benefit. As I have established, the elites of Santa Cruz do not wish to see themselves as part of an indigenous nation; instead, they prefer the homogenizing logic of monoculture and its associated power, regardless of the social or environmental impacts. Fernando Cuéllar, president of the CPSC expressed the department’s vision in 2017; “Although Santa Cruz has a relatively acceptable economic and social development, according to Bolivian standards, this is not enough. We have to leave the Third World, we have to compare ourselves with the most advanced countries on the planet, that has to be the next objective.” (Ortiz 2017).

Following the developments of the 2010s, culminating in the 2019 wildfires, Morales’s use of the “vivir bien” principle and other indigenous ideologies rang empty to many observers. Bold asserts that the MAS came to represent an ‘indigenous’ identity that was “fetishized in the city” while embracing capitalism (Bold 2017, 129). Following the 2019 wildfires which destroyed 2.4 million hectares of forest, grassland and savanna in many pointed fingers at the MAS’s policies of frontier expansion, including the legal permission to carry out *chaqueos* (land

clearances through burning) which was promulgated in 2019.(El Diario, 6 Sept. 2019). Bolivian professor José Luis Alvaro argued in Página Siete in July 2019 that MAS was recreating the “colonial and anti-indigenous extractivism, implanted here, in our country, by European invaders and genociders from and from the long 16th century.” (Saavedra, 14 Jul. 2019)

The fires can be seen as a direct result of impoverishing nature of monocultures, rooted in their modernist logic which sees accumulation as the only way to development. As I have established in this chapter, the ideologies of the Santa Cruz elites became deeply rooted in the MAS in the 2010s, leading to disastrous consequences. The Santa Cruz elites were able to influence the government towards their system of monocultures and their modernizing logics, in which they strive to “leave the third world” no matter environmental or social cost. The MAS’s project, once articulating an “alternative to modernity,” shifted to embrace the modernizing logics of the Santa Cruz elites for fear of food shortages, along with mere economic and political convenience. To some extent, the MAS leaders also came to accept “monoculture of the mind” promoted by Santa Cruz and the surrounding world. Morales’ Vice President, García Linera stated in 2017 ‘deep down, everybody wants to be modern’ Colletta and Raftopolous 2020 13)

In Our Territory We Are Kings

Following the 2019 political crisis, the Bolivian Right grabbed power, and many poor and indigenous Bolivians came to see the re-election of the MAS as their only hope from a slide into fascism. Despite the landslide win of the MAS candidate in the 2020 elections, the system of monocultures which the MAS came to embrace is openly criticized in Santa Cruz and beyond, offering hope that alternative imaginaries have not been completely destroyed by the agro-state.

The connection between the destruction of biodiversity and diverse knowledge and culture is apparent to many indigenous critics of the MAS. Ruth Alípaz, an indigenous representative from La Paz, asserted “The indigenous people are territory. The link is only one. There are no indigenous people without territory. By devastating territories, we are devastating the population.” She says that the jungle is changing due to the damage caused by Monoculture. “All of this is a way of making us disappear as a culture” (Arteaga, 5 Nov. 2018).

Rafael Quispe, the leader of a council of lowland indigenous people (CONMAQ) stated; “Capitalism or socialism is extractive, consumerist, developmentalist. In this sense, they are the same. We have to speak of a new model of development, an alternative to the system. Because both capitalism and socialism will go on changing the planet. And the development model of the indigenous peoples is the ayllu, the communitarian development model. We original peoples for thousands and thousands and thousands of years have been living in equilibrium and respect for our Pachamama (Mother Earth), from whom we emerged.”(Fabricant 2013 166)

Manuela Argarañaz, a representative of the association of indigenous counsels in San Ignacio, Santa Cruz argues that the greatest threats to her community are monoculture and the production of transgenic soybeans. She claims “The monoculture is linked to transnational companies, which give an advance to the peasants to deforest the forest and promise to pay the expenses, and then the balance remains for the communities. They buy the grain at a certain price, agreed with the communities, but when they see the production, the companies lower the price by 70 or 80%.” She asserts that this contributes to continued impoverishment of the peasants, who become trapped in cycles of debt, and are forced to deforest more to meet the debt. In her community, she says that around 200 families left the sustainable, diversified production system which they had long used and dedicated themselves to the “promising” monoculture

production of Soy and other crops. "They are still looking for a way to get out of debt," says the leader. Furthermore, she asserts that agrochemicals from monoculture production "fall like rain" on nearby towns, and that the agribusinesses, many owned by foreigners, "do not care if we run out of water due to deforestation, they are only interested in taking money back to their countries."

Despite the grim circumstances that Argarañaz describes, she also expresses hope; "They say that the indigenous people are poor. Lie. Poverty is when the indigenous migrate to the city, where they do not have a home or anything to eat. In their land, the indigenous are one of the richest people... in the city we are poor. In our territory we are the kings." (Arteaga, 5 Nov. 2018).

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION: THINKING BEYOND MONOCULTURES

An article in *Él Diario* a month after the election of Luis Arce Catacora, stated “21 days after the arrival of the new government... it was possible to observe the presence of a climate of complete tranquility and that gave the population the opportunity to relax and dedicate themselves to rebuilding their activities.” President Arce dismissed the “outdated” Minister of Agriculture and Lands, demonstrating “ethics” and “the will to put an end to the populism that threatens to impose its designs and return to the days of unrest.” The article asserted that Bolivia will “once again march along the broad paths of democracy.” (*El Diario*, 5 Dec. 2020)

In Arce’s few months in office, it is unclear what direction he will take in his relations with the Santa Cruz elite and the food regime as a whole. However, he has shown some commitment to taking on the oligarchies of the east. In April, 2021, Arce repealed Supreme Decrees 4232, 4238 and 4385 which had permitted access to certain biotechnologies for soybean, corn, wheat, cotton and sugar cane. The president of Anapo described it as a “great setback” and promised to push back against Arce (*El Diario*, 23 Apr. 2021).

In Bolivia, like other primary producer countries, the political geography inscribes the historical record of resource values upon the physical geography. Regions of Bolivia have gained political and economic power from resource values at times of commodity booms, yet when commodities bust power is reconfigured. The tumultuousness of the markets for primary goods mean that this geography of power is rewritten every few years, though stratification along lines of race and class have remained a constant. Populist counter-neoliberal movements and indigenous movements have threatened this hegemony, however the party which institutionalized these movements, the MAS, has still had to contend with the geographies of

natural resources and power. Under Morales, it chose the route of alliance with the Santa Cruz elite, thus compromising their original vision.

Territorial hegemony in Santa Cruz by the department elites was reinscribed through the identities and spectacles of the autonomy movement. This movement demonstrates how increasing salience of identity and sovereignty emerging from indigenous movements offers a new language of power and claims to territory. The Cruceño elite promulgated an identity rooted in space rather than history, obscuring the histories of colonial oppression and racism and confining indigenous identity and political power to the “Indio Permitido.”

Morales, in order to promote national food sovereignty and receive the tax revenue required for his social programs, increasingly sided with the Cruceño elite as the other commodities which the country relies on, particularly minerals and natural gas, lost value in the international market. Territorial control over natural resources promises economic and political power, however, in the primary-producer countries of the global south this power is tenuous and subject to the larger geographies of power.

Quijano and others in the field of post-colonial theory have argued that Latin American elites, often descended from colonial elites, have long seen themselves as more of citizens of Europe, somehow removed from the country they inhabit. The transnational partnerships and identities of these elite, etched across the American continent, provide easy pathways for the food regime to operate in (Quijano 1999). While the Landifusta system and the colonial elites such as those which thrive in Santa Cruz are not explicitly neoliberal- and some would be better described as feudal- their hegemonic power over their respective regions, constituted by and constitutive of violent defense of the severe land inequality, provide an opening for the transnational agro-interests to enter.

Reflections on the Food Regime and Modernity

Shiva highlights something which has been developed by a number of scholars, that destruction of biodiversity very often coincides with destruction of cultures. However, she also highlights something of fundamental importance: that the “monoculture of the mind” in fact is a necessary precedent for the destruction of biodiversity and the production of monocultures (which itself facilitates and perpetuates the monoculture of the mind).

While primitive accumulation (Marx 1867) and accumulation by dispossession (Harvey 2004) necessarily occur under conditions of violence and coercion, actors in the food regime must also work within layered systems of governance and law. Within liberal democracies in the global south, the food regime can be threatened by a democratic outcry by those displaced or harmed by agroindustry. Thus, as in the case of Santa Cruz, agro-industry must develop strategies to ally themselves with the national government, or else attempt to re-territorialize power in order to carry out their project of monocultures. In order to gain popular support for their project, agro-industry must cast themselves as part of a national project for economic development or “food sovereignty,” rooted in an ethic of modernization which makes alternative systems of agriculture invisible and perpetuates the “disappearance of alternatives.”

Food regime theory emphasizes the temporal specificity of the current corporate food system, while also revealing the spatial concentrations of power which have accelerated under the corporatization of the food system. Food regime theory historicizes the current geopolitical system of food without succumbing to the narrative of modernization, which casts the current food system as the result of a historical march towards efficiency and rationality. Thus

understanding the food regime's "monoculture of the mind" also requires one to identify the spatial and temporal identity of modernity itself.

In order to make sense of this, I draw from post-colonial theory, particularly that of a number of Latin American theorists. Escobar asserts these theorists proceed by "refracting modernity through the lens of colonially," thus questioning the character of modernity and "unfreezing the potential for thinking from difference and towards the constitution of alternative worlds." (Escobar 2004, 217)

These Latin American theorists identify the character of Modernity as inherently Euro-centric, and the spread of modernity as the "imposition of global design by a particular local history, in such a way that it has subalternised other local histories and designs." (Escobar 2004, 217) These theories also "makes visible modernity's underside, that is, this subaltern knowledges and cultural practices world-wide that modernity itself shunned, suppressed, made invisible made invisible and disqualified." This understand is defined as "coloniality", which manifests in "being, knowledge and power" and has existed side by side with modernity since the conquest of America. (210) It is "the same coloniality that asserts itself at the borders of the modern/colonial world system, and from which subaltern groups attempt to reconstitute place-based imaginaries and local worlds. From this perspective, coloniality is constitutive of modernity." (Escobar 2004, 210) Reframing modernity in such a way challenges the idea that modernity has triumphed, and will continue to be dominant all over the globe, that "*from now on, it is modernity all the way down, everywhere, until the end of time.*" (Escobar 2004, 211-212)

The anti-neoliberal social movements in Bolivia and the MAS regime can be seen as ways in which modernity, and its "underside" of colonially are openly criticized and contested by individuals, organizations and states. These individuals and collectives have weilded of

alternative, sub-hegemonic knowledges- which modernity has attempt to delegitimate yet continue to circulate and hold legitimacy in spaces of alterity. Escobar identifies this phenomenon as “subaltern intelligent communities,” which he argues “enact practices of social, economic and ecological difference that are useful for thinking about alternative local and regional worlds.” (Escobar 2004, 210)

Escobar that politics of place are an essential component of imagining beyond modernity. He asserts that fears of the risk of ‘localisms’ are valid, however this does not discount the possibilities which can arise from politics of place; “). Politics of place is a discourse of desire and possibility that builds on subaltern practices of difference for the (re)construction of alternative socio-natural worlds.... In this articulation lies one of the best hopes of re-imagining and re-making local and regional worlds-in short, of 'worlds and knowledges otherwise.”

The project of the MAS, and the social movements which brought it to power, can be seen as a profoundly successful attempt to implement alternative knowledges, reimagining modernity and socionature at the scale of the nation. However, a ‘politics of place’ at the subnational level, articulated in the Santa Cruz autonomy movement, posed a serious threat to initially reimagining of modernity initially proposed by the MAS.

It may seem as if the Santa Cruz autonomy movement gives credence to the risk of ‘localisms’ as Escobar describes (Escobar 2004, 210). However I caution against the hasty characterization of the autonomy movement as a true “politics of place.” As evident by the movement’s profoundly hegemonic leadership, and the violent socionatural effects of the monocultures it advocates, it seems to me the opposite; that the autonomy movement can be seen as an example of modernity- and its colonial underside- defending itself *against* a true politics of

place. On the contrary, their ideology is that of euro-centric modernity, a local ideology which has been made to seem global and universal through the exclusion of alternatives.

The Santa Cruz elites and their movement constitute one of the many forms of what Escobar terms “social fascism” which maintain the conditions of the global south as subordinate to the north. The forces of social fascism increasingly occupy high levels of the state in the countries of the global south- Bolsonaro is a notable example. Populist, right wing authoritarians brought to power through corruption or democratic election from a populous who has come to believe that they too can become “modern.” In Santa Cruz, a relatively novel situation occurs in which the forces of social fascism are outside of the state and cast themselves as subaltern in order to further their hegemonic project of socionatural control.

The socionatural system which these elites promote, centered in a logic of extractivism and monoculture, is profoundly rooted in euro-centric notions of modernity and development. These systems result in profound environmental and social devastation, as has been seen particularly profoundly in recent years. These harms are most deeply felt by the indigenous and peasant population. Yet however much the elites of Santa Cruz wish to see themselves as the bearers and benefactors of this modernist system, they are not. Neither the worldview of euro-centric modernity nor the food regime is oriented in their favor. As climate change and deforestation incurred by industrial agriculture devastate Bolivia’s socionature and make the “productive rationality” of Santa Cruz’s agriculture obsolete, the contradictions of these regimes are sure to become only more obvious, not only to those most dispossessed by the regime but even by the elites who see their system of agriculture failing before their very eyes. They will surely continue to overcome these issues through the technologies which the transnational corporations of the food regime peddle to them at EXPOSOYA and EXPOCRUZ, seeking

salvation in climate change resistant GMOs and technologies. In the case of Santa Cruz and others, the modernizing project contradict itself, promoting destruction in pursuit of a system which is profitable for very few. Subaltern peoples, knowledges and ecosystems become the “the victims of modernity, all of them victims of an irrational act that contradicts modernity’s ideal of rationality.”(Dussel 2000, 473).

This is not to say that the elites of Santa Cruz are to become an ally in the process of change- their ideology is too colonial, too extractivist. If monocultures of soy cease to be productive despite all attempts, the alliances of Santa Cruz elites who make up the CPSC and the *logias* will simply turn to another resource, another form of accumulation. However, it is my hope that the essential contradictions of their systems have been laid bare to the population of Santa Cruz, and Bolivia as a whole. The dream of the Santa Cruz elite, according to the Ximena Soruco, is the dream of “pure domination.....It is a field of war of where the enemy is eliminated. The dream of the Santa Cruz elite, therefore, is not the hegemonic dream, but a dream of domination, which cannot last long.”(Soruco, Plata and Medieros 2008, 94)

Throughout this thesis, I have intended to highlight the essential violence of the food regime and the broader systems of global capital by rooting theories of modernity in the earth- which sustains us and, which we are killing. The example of Santa Cruz Right lays bare how processes of violence, domination and social fascism form an essential part of the logic of our current food regime, although they may be invisible to us in the Global North. While global financial institutions, transnational corporations and dominant governments in the Global North uphold the systems of the food regime, they depend on coalitions with local power groups in the global south such as the institutions of Santa Cruz, who form the on-the-ground shock troops of

modernity and monoculture, facilitating the “disappearance of diversity” and thus, the “disappearance of alternatives.”

Thinking of Alternatives in the Post-COVID-19 era

In recent months, multiple crises caused by industrial agriculture and the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the socio-ecological fragility of the capitalist modernity, and could well be the beginning of a cascade of catastrophes which will impact humanity if this form of development persists (Altieri and Nicholls 2020, 881-882) The COVID-19 era has caused increased hunger, food riots and shortages along with massive amounts of ‘surplus’ food made up of crops left to rot in the fields and animals waiting to be killed. The Chief of the World Food Program asserted ‘There is [...] a real danger that more people could potentially die from the economic impact of Covid-19 than from the virus itself’. .”(Ploeg 2020, 948)

A growing number of scholars have proposed Agro-ecology-forms of locally specific, diversified and sustainable agriculture inspired by peasant agricultures- as a way of thinking beyond our current food system. Altieri and Nicholls assert that Agroecology provides a path towards a post-COVID-19 agriculture which is able to overcome the widespread disruption of food supplies through emphasizing small farms and diversified agriculture (Altieri and Nicholls 2020, 881).

Ploeg asserts that the locally specific, diversified systems of peasant agriculture which provide the majority of the world’s food are “a formidable starting point for the much-needed new solutions for the post-pandemic period.”(Ploeg 2020, 966) Diversified small scale systems have been proven to be more resilient to climate change than monoculture systems (Altieri and Toledo, 2011 596). The way in which agro-ecology has been imagined and adapted in Latin America is explicitly political, built upon

pillars of land reform, food sovereignty, local expert knowledge, and diversified systems (Altieri, Nicholls and Montalba 2017, 2). In its totality, incorporating an agro-ecological approach means a return to “thinking in terms of diversity” (Shiva 1999).

Monocultures dominate 80% of the 1.5 billion hectares of arable land on the planet, posing one of the largest threats to the global environment (Altieri and Nicholls 2020, 882) In this moment of socioeconomic crisis and climate change, the devastation is overwhelming. However in Latin America, this crisis, like the crisis of neoliberalism which spurned the “pink tide,” offers opportunities for thinking of alternatives. Furthermore, the centrality of agro-industry and land in this crisis provides fertile ground for land and food based collective action which challenge the very basis of the food regime and capitalist modernity as a whole. If we are to build a more egalitarian, plural, and just world, it can’t be fed by monoculture.

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